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THE NOVELS, TALES, AND PLAYS OF JOHN GALSWORTHY

DEVON EDITION

VOLUME XIV

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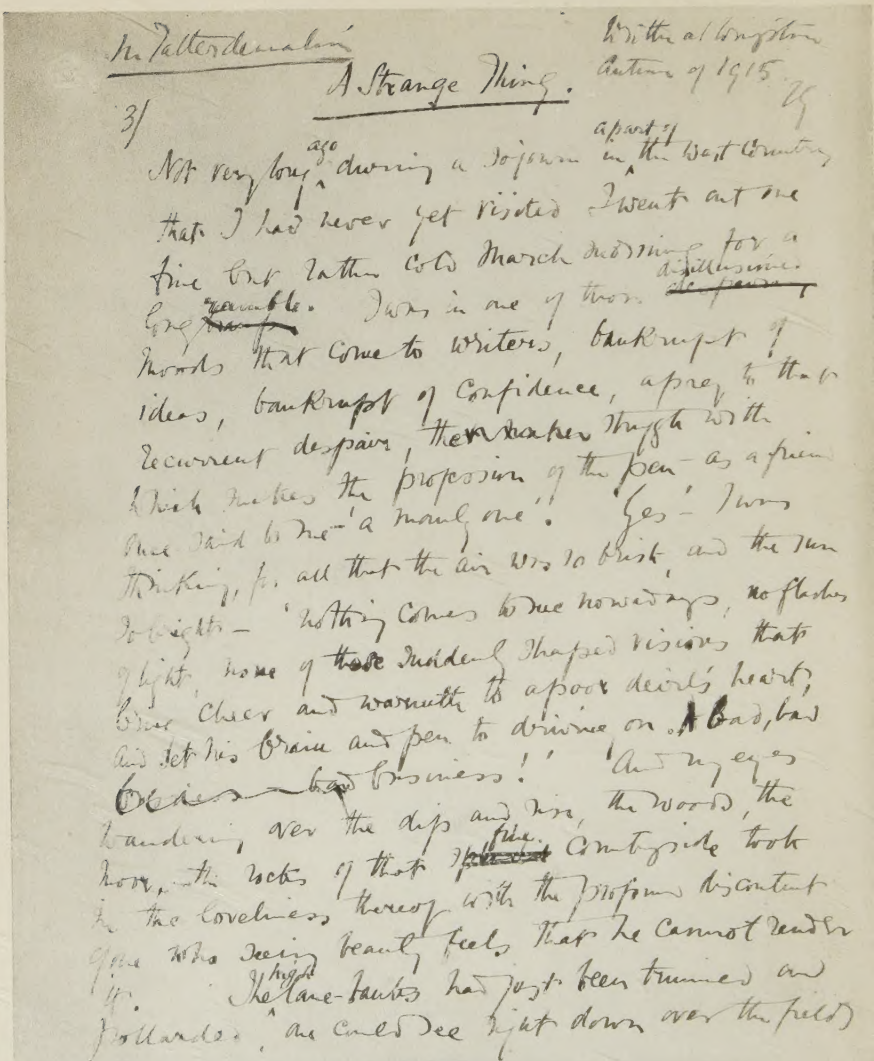

Quality
and Other Stories

By
John Galsworthy

New York
Charles Scribner's Sons
1927

WITHDRAWN
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IN THIS VOLUME THE FIRST TWO STORIES ARE DEDICATED TO JOHN WALLER HILLS; STORIES III-XV TO E. V. LUCAS; "A SIMPLE TALE" AND "ULTIMA THULE" TO H. W. NEVINSON; STORIES XVIII-XXXI TO ELIZABETH LUCAS; THE REMAINING STORIES TO R. H. SAUTER.

J. G.

PREFACE

In this volume are collected from "A Motley," "The Inn of Tranquillity," "The Little Man," "Tatterdemalion," and "Captures," all short work to which the term "Story" can be applied with a certain orthodoxy. This course has been followed for their author's satisfaction, and for the convenience of those who may wish to form a quick and coherent judgment as to what sort of short-story writer they are here reading. Only the last tale exceeds five thousand odd words, and they have been written at all and any times between 1900 *and now. The two earliest are: "A Woman," and "A Reversion to Type"; the two latest: "Late—299," and "Had a Horse."*

One is often asked what are the canons of short-story writing. Frankly I do not know; but there are certainly these: "Write only what interests yourself," "From sentence to sentence grip your reader." The first is a matter of doing justice to your own temperament; the second a matter of technique, which can only be acquired through hard work, varied experiment, and repeated failure. In any case, the art of the short story is like that of the

hundred yards race—the writer, like the runner, should be "all out" with every stride he takes.

Taken by and large the quite short story does not seem the happiest medium for English and American writers. I can think of none who can so compact poignancy into small space as De Maupassant, and only Katherine Mansfield who can catch a living moment so deftly as Tchekov. In Kipling, even at his best, there is mannerism, and philosophic arrest; in O. Henry, even at his best, a diction rather provincial, and a jocularity somewhat infernal. To concrete perfect fluency in the perfectly staccato, or the dramatic in brief fluency, seems to defeat Anglo-Saxon brains and languages.

English and Americans tend to attempt it in verse rather than prose. Half the educated young men and women in Anglo-Saxon countries would now seem to be poets. The development is intriguing, but all against the short story.

There are two stories in this volume which are not fiction—"The Mother Stone," and "The Prisoner." I have never yet been in prison myself, except as visitor in body and soul, and that is quite enough. It is one of the tragedies of human existence, that the ugly jobs of civilisation, such as the administration of justice, or the handling of lunacy, should of general necessity fall almost always either to the tough-hided and unsympathetic, or to

those who have a streak of that terrible self-righteousness which believes in retribution for itself, the sort of people who in old days dealt in religious persecution, and would deal in it again if the times were more favourable. And there would seem no escape from this tragedy, for more sensitive and less self-righteous souls can seldom be found to undertake these grizzly administrative tasks.

Nothing could be more ghastly than to see with bodily eyes some great, slow-wheeled contraption of iron or stone slowly grind and flatten a man to death; scarcely less ghastly is the spectacle which meets the vision of one watching our prisons—even in these years of comparative grace—slowly crushing the spirits of our prisoners, or warping them into confirmed revolt.

A story such as "The Prisoner" raises the vexed question: How far a writer should permit his temperament to creep into the texture of his stories. Criticism has been very kind to this writer on the whole, but he has in his day been charged with so many opposite faults of temperament and texture that if he had been impressionable by comment he must long ago have stopped writing out of sheer bewilderment. He has been rated for pessimism, and for idealism; for soulless impartiality, and for shameless advocacy; for austerity, and for sentimentality; for chilly artistry, and for rash prop-

agandism; for cynical cleverness, and for naïve humanitarianism; for bitterness and for sweetness; for lack of vision and for being visionary; for being a satirist and for not being one; for emotionalism and for not feeling; for being a rebel and for being a Forsyte. The fact is that if a writer stopped to check or heat his mood to mean temperature, self-consciousness would reduce him to impotence. Better that he should take himself month by month as the tides of his being dictate, and let himself go upon them.

JOHN GALSWORTHY.

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QUALITY AND OTHER STORIES

I

QUALITY

KNEW him from the days of my extreme youth, because he made my father's boots; inhabiting with his elder brother two little shops let into one, in a small by-street—now no more, but then most fashionably placed in the West End.

That tenement had a certain quiet distinction; there was no sign upon its face that he made for any of the Royal Family—merely his own German name of Gessler Brothers; and in the window a few pairs of boots. I remember that it always troubled me to account for those unvarying boots in the window, for he made only what was ordered, reaching nothing down, and it seemed so inconceivable that what he made could ever have failed to fit. Had he bought them to put there? That, too, seemed inconceivable. He would never have tolerated in his house leather on which he had not worked himself. Besides, they were too beautiful—the pair of pumps, so inexpressibly slim, the patent leathers with cloth

tops, making water come into one's mouth, the tall brown riding boots with marvellous sooty glow, as if, though new, they had been worn a hundred years. Those pairs could only have been made by one who saw before him the Soul of Boot —so truly were they prototypes incarnating the very spirit of all foot-gear. These thoughts, of course, came to me later, though even when I was promoted to him, at the age of perhaps fourteen, some inkling haunted me of the dignity of himself and brother. For to make boots—such boots as he made—seemed to me then, and still seems to me, mysterious and wonderful.

I remember well my shy remark, one day, while stretching out to him my youthful foot:

"Isn't it awfully hard to do, Mr. Gessler?"

And his answer, given with a sudden smile from out of the sardonic redness of his beard: "Id is an Ardt!"

Himself, he was a little as if made from leather, with his yellow crinkly face, and crinkly reddish hair and beard, and neat folds slanting down his cheeks to the corners of his mouth, and his guttural and one-toned voice; for leather is a sardonic substance, and stiff and slow of purpose. And that was the character of his face, save that his eyes, which were grey-blue, had in them the simple gravity of one secretly possessed by the

Ideal. His elder brother was so very like him—though watery, paler in every way, with a great industry—that sometimes in early days I was not quite sure of him until the interview was over. Then I knew that it was he, if the words, "I will ask my brudder," had not been spoken; and that, if they had, it was his elder brother.

When one grew old and wild and ran up bills, one somehow never ran them up with Gessler Brothers. It would not have seemed becoming to go in there and stretch out one's foot to that blue iron-spectacled glance, owing him for more than —say—two pairs, just the comfortable reassurance that one was still his client.

For it was not possible to go to him very often —his boots lasted terribly, having something beyond the temporary—some, as it were, essence of boot stitched into them.

One went in, not as into most shops, in the mood of: "Please serve me, and let me go!" but restfully, as one enters a church; and, sitting on the single wooden chair, waited—for there was never anybody there. Soon, over the top edge of that sort of well—rather dark, and smelling soothingly of leather—which formed the shop, there would be seen his face, or that of his elder brother, peering down. A guttural sound, and the tip-tap of bast slippers beating the narrow

wooden stairs, and he would stand before one without coat, a little bent, in leather apron, with sleeves turned back, blinking—as if awakened from some dream of boots, or like an owl surprised in daylight and annoyed at this interruption.

And I would say: "How do you do, Mr. Gessler? Could you make me a pair of Russia leather boots?"

Without a word he would leave me, retiring whence he came, or into the other portion of the shop, and I would continue to rest in the wooden chair, inhaling the incense of his trade. Soon he would come back, holding in his thin, veined hand a piece of gold-brown leather. With eyes fixed on it, he would remark: "What a beaudiful biece!" When I, too, had admired it, he would speak again. "When do you wand dem?" And I would answer: "Oh! As soon as you conveniently can." And he would say: "To-morrow fordnighd?" Or if he were his elder brother: "I will ask my brudder!"

Then I would murmur: "Thank you! Good-morning, Mr. Gessler." "Goot-morning!" he would reply, still looking at the leather in his hand. And as I moved to the door, I would hear the tip-tap of his bast slippers restoring him, up the stairs, to his dream of boots. But if it were

some new kind of foot-gear that he had not yet made me, then indeed he would observe ceremony—divesting me of my boot and holding it long in his hand, looking at it with eyes at once critical and loving, as if recalling the glow with which he had created it, and rebuking the way in which one had disorganised this masterpiece. Then, placing my foot on a piece of paper, he would two or three times tickle the outer edges with a pencil and pass his nervous fingers over my toes, feeling himself into the heart of my requirements.

I cannot forget that day on which I had occasion to say to him: "Mr. Gessler, that last pair of town walking-boots creaked, you know."

He looked at me for a time without replying, as if expecting me to withdraw or qualify the statement, then said:

"Id shouldn'd 'ave greaked."

"It did, I'm afraid."

"You goddem wed before dey found demselves?"

"I don't think so."

At that he lowered his eyes, as if hunting for memory of those boots, and I felt sorry I had mentioned this grave thing.

"Zend dem back!" he said; "I will look at dem."

A feeling of compassion for my creaking boots surged up in me, so well could I imagine the sorrowful long curiosity of regard which he would bend on them.

"Zome boods," he said slowly, "are bad from birdt. If I can do noding wid dem, I dake dem off your bill."

Once (once only) I went absent-mindedly into his shop in a pair of boots bought in an emergency at some large firm's. He took my order without showing me any leather, and I could feel his eyes penetrating the inferior integument of my foot. At last he said:

"Dose are nod my boods."

The tone was not one of anger, nor of sorrow, not even of contempt, but there was in it something quiet that froze the blood. He put his hand down and pressed a finger on the place where the left boot, endeavouring to be fashionable, was not quite comfortable.

"Id 'urds you dere," he said. "Dose big virms 'ave no self-respect. Drash!" And then, as if something had given way within him, he spoke long and bitterly. It was the only time I ever heard him discuss the conditions and hardships of his trade.

"Dey get id all," he said, "dey get id by adverdisement, nod by work. Dey dake it away

from us, who lofe our boods. Id gomes to this—bresently I haf no work. Every year id gets less—you will see." And looking at his lined face I saw things I had never noticed before, bitter things and bitter struggle—and what a lot of grey hairs there seemed suddenly in his red beard!

As best I could, I explained the circumstances of the purchase of those ill-omened boots. But his face and voice made a so deep impression that during the next few minutes I ordered many pairs. Nemesis fell! They lasted more terribly than ever. And I was not able conscientiously to go to him for nearly two years.

When at last I went I was surprised to find that outside one of the two little windows of his shop another name was painted, also that of a boot-maker—making, of course, for the Royal Family. The old familiar boots, no longer in dignified isolation, were huddled in the single window. Inside, the now contracted well of the one little shop was more scented and darker than ever. And it was longer than usual, too, before a face peered down, and the tip-tap of the bast slippers began. At last he stood before me, and, gazing through those rusty iron spectacles, said:

"Mr. ——, isn'd it?"

"Ah! Mr. Gessler," I stammered, "but your boots are really *too* good, you know! See, these

are quite decent still!" And I stretched out to him my foot. He looked at it.

"Yes," he said, "beople do nod wand good boods, id seems."

To get away from his reproachful eyes and voice I hastily remarked: "What have you done to your shop?"

He answered quietly: "Id was too exbensif. Do you wand some boods?"

I ordered three pairs, though I had only wanted two, and quickly left. I had, I know not quite what feeling of being part, in his mind, of a conspiracy against him; or not perhaps so much against him as against his idea of boot. One does not, I suppose, care to feel like that; for it was again many months before my next visit to his shop, paid, I remember, with the feeling: "Oh! well, I can't leave the old boy—so here goes! Perhaps it'll be his elder brother!"

For his elder brother, I knew, had not character enough to reproach me, even dumbly.

And, to my relief, in the shop there did appear to be his elder brother, handling a piece of leather.

"Well, Mr. Gessler," I said, "how are you?"

He came close, and peered at me.

"I am breddy well," he said slowly; "but my elder brudder is dead."

And I saw that it was indeed himself—but how aged and wan! And never before had I heard him mention his brother. Much shocked, I murmured: "Oh! I am sorry!"

"Yes," he answered, "he was a good man, he made a good bood; but he is dead." And he touched the top of his head, where the hair had suddenly gone as thin as it had been on that of his poor brother, to indicate, I suppose, the cause of death. "He could nod ged over losing de oder shop. Do you wand any boods?" And he held up the leather in his hand: "Id's a beaudiful biece."

I ordered several pairs. It was very long before they came—but they were better than ever. One simply could not wear them out. And soon after that I went abroad.

It was over a year before I was again in London. And the first shop I went to was my old friend's. I had left a man of sixty, I came back to one of seventy-five, pinched and worn and tremulous, who genuinely, this time, did not at first know me.

"Oh! Mr. Gessler," I said, sick at heart; "how splendid your boots are! See, I've been wearing this pair nearly all the time I've been abroad; and they're not half worn out, are they?"

He looked long at my boots—a pair of Russia

leather, and his face seemed to regain steadiness. Putting his hand on my instep, he said:

"Do dey vid you here? I 'ad drouble wid dat bair, I remember."

I assured him that they had fitted beautifully.

"Do you wand any boods?" he said. "I can make dem quickly; id is a slack dime."

I answered: "Please, please! I want boots all round—every kind!"

"I will make a vresh model. Your food must be bigger." And with utter slowness, he traced round my foot, and felt my toes, only once looking up to say:

"Did I dell you my brudder was dead?"

To watch him was painful, so feeble had he grown; I was glad to get away.

I had given those boots up, when one evening they came. Opening the parcel, I set the four pairs out in a row. Then one by one I tried them on. There was no doubt about it. In shape and fit, in finish and quality of leather, they were the best he had ever made me. And in the mouth of one of the Town walking-boots I found his bill. The amount was the same as usual, but it gave me quite a shock. He had never before sent it in till quarter day. I flew down-stairs, and wrote a cheque, and posted it at once with my own hand.

A week later, passing the little street, I thought

I would go in and tell him how splendidly the new boots fitted. But when I came to where his shop had been, his name was gone. Still there, in the window, were the slim pumps, the patent leathers with cloth tops, the sooty riding boots.

I went in, very much disturbed. In the two little shops—again made into one—was a young man with an English face.

"Mr. Gessler in?" I said.

He gave me a strange, ingratiating look.

"No, sir," he said, "no. But we can attend to anything with pleasure. We've taken the shop over. You've seen our name, no doubt, next door. We make for some very good people."

"Yes, yes," I said; "but Mr. Gessler?"

"Oh!" he answered; "dead."

"Dead! But I only received these boots from him last Wednesday week."

"Ah!" he said; "a shockin' go. Poor old man starved 'imself."

"Good God!"

"Slow starvation, the doctor called it! You see he went to work in such a way! Would keep the shop on; wouldn't have a soul touch his boots except himself. When he got an order, it took him such a time. People won't wait. He lost everybody. And there he'd sit, goin' on and on—I will say that for him—not a man in London made a

better boot! But look at the competition! He never advertised! Would 'ave the best leather, too, and do it all 'imself. Well, there it is. What could you expect with his ideas?"

"But starvation——!"

"That may be a bit flowery, as the sayin' is—but I know myself he was sittin' over his boots day and night, to the very last. You see I used to watch him. Never gave 'imself time to eat; never had a penny in the house. All went in rent and leather. How he lived so long I don't know. He regular let his fire go out. He was a character. But he made good boots."

"Yes," I said, "he made good boots."

1911.

II

THE BLACK GODMOTHER

ITTING out on the lawn at tea with our friend and his retriever, we had been discussing those massacres of the helpless which had of late occurred, and wondering that they should have been committed by the soldiery of so civilised a State, when, in a momentary pause of our astonishment, our friend, who had been listening in silence, crumpling the drooping soft ear of his dog, looked up and said, "The cause of atrocities is generally the violence of Fear. Panic's at the back of most crimes and follies."

Knowing that his philosophical statements were always the result of concrete instance, and that he would not tell us what that instance was if we asked him—such being his nature—we were careful not to agree.

He gave us a look out of those eyes of his, so like the eyes of a mild eagle, and said abruptly: "What do you say to this, then? . . . I was out in the dog-days last year with this fellow of mine,

looking for Osmunda, and stayed some days in a village—never mind the name. Coming back one evening from my tramp, I saw some boys stoning a mealy-coloured dog. I went up and told the young devils to stop it. They only looked at me in the injured way boys do, and one of them called out, 'It's mad, guv'nor!' I told them to clear off, and they took to their heels. The dog followed me. It was a young, leggy, mild-looking mongrel, cross—I should say—between a brown retriever and an Irish terrier. There was froth about its lips, and its eyes were watery; it looked indeed as if it might be in distemper. I was afraid of infection for this fellow of mine, and whenever it came too close shooed it away, till at last it slunk off altogether. Well, about nine o'clock, when I was settling down to write by the open window of my sitting-room—still daylight, and very quiet and warm—there began that most maddening sound, the barking of an unhappy dog. I could do nothing with that continual 'Yap—yap!' going on, and it was too hot to shut the window; so I went out to see if I could stop it. The men were all at the pub, and the women just finished with their gossip; there was no sound at all but the continual barking of this dog, somewhere away out in the fields. I travelled by ear across three meadows, till I came on a hay-stack

by a pool of water. There was the dog sure enough —the same mealy-coloured mongrel, tied to a stake, yapping, and making frantic little runs on a bit of rusty chain; whirling round and round the stake, then standing quite still, and shivering. I went up and spoke to it, but it backed into the hay-stack, and there it stayed shrinking away from me, with its tongue hanging out. It had been heavily struck by something on the head; the cheek was cut, one eye half-closed, and an ear badly swollen. I tried to get hold of it, but the poor thing was beside itself with fear. It snapped and flew round so that I had to give it up, and sit down with this fellow here beside me, to try and quiet it—a strange dog, you know, will generally form his estimate of you from the way it sees you treat another dog. I had to sit there quite half an hour before it would let me go up to it, pull the stake out, and lead it away. The poor beast, though it was so feeble from the blows it had received, was still half-frantic, and I didn't dare to touch it; and all the time I took good care that this fellow here didn't come too near. Then came the question what was to be done. There was no vet, of course, and I'd no place to put it except my sitting-room, which didn't belong to me. But, looking at its battered head, and its half-mad eyes, I thought: 'No trusting you with these

bumpkins; you'll have to come in here for the night!' Well, I got it in, and heaped two or three of those hairy little red rugs landladies are so fond of, up in a corner, and got it on to them, and put down my bread and milk. But it wouldn't eat —its sense of proportion was all gone, fairly destroyed by terror. It lay there moaning, and every now and then it raised its head with a 'yap' of sheer fright, dreadful to hear, and bit the air, as if its enemies were on it again; and this fellow of mine lay in the opposite corner, with his head on his paw, watching it. I sat up for a long time with that poor beast, sick enough, and wondering how it had come to be stoned and kicked and battered into this state; and next day I made it my business to find out." Our friend paused, scanned us a little angrily, and then went on: "It had made its first appearance, it seems, following a bicyclist. There are men, you know—save the mark—who, when their beasts get ill or too expensive, jump on their bicycles and take them for a quick run, taking care never to look behind them. When they get back home they say: 'Hallo! where's Fido?' Fido is nowhere, and there's an end! Well, this poor puppy gave up just as it got to our village; and, roaming about in search of water, attached itself to a farm labourer. The man—with excellent intentions, as

he told me himself—tried to take hold of it, but too abruptly, so that it was startled, and snapped at him. Whereon he kicked it for a dangerous cur, and it went drifting back towards the village, and fell in with the boys coming home from school. It thought, no doubt, that they were going to kick it too, and nipped one of them who took it by the collar. Thereupon they hullabalooed and stoned it down the road to where I found them. Then I put in my little bit of torture, and drove it away, through fear of infection to my own dog. After that it seems to have fallen in with a man who told me: 'Well, you see, he came sneakin' round my house, with the children playin', and snapped at them when they went to stroke him, so that they came running in to their mother, an' she called to me in a fine takin' about a mad dog. I ran out with a shovel and gave 'im one, and drove him out. I'm sorry if he wasn't mad, he looked it right enough; you can't be too careful with strange dogs.' Its next acquaintance was an old stone-breaker, a very decent sort. 'Well! you see,' the old man explained to me, 'the dog came smellin' round my stones, an' it wouldn' come near, an' it wouldn' go away; it was all froth and blood about the jaw, and its eyes glared green at me. I thought to meself, bein' the dog-days—I don't like the look o' you,

you look funny! So I took a stone, an' got it here, just on the ear; an' it fell over. And I thought to meself: Well, you've got to finish it, or it'll go bitin' somebody, for sure! But when I come to it with my hammer, the dog it got up—an' you know how it is when there's somethin' you've 'alf killed, and you feel sorry, and yet you feel you must finish it, an' you hit at it blind, you hit at it agen an' agen. The poor thing, it wriggled and snapped, an' I was terrified it'd bite me, an' some'ow it got away.'" Again our friend paused, and this time we dared not look at him.

"The next hospitality it was shown," he went on presently, "was by a farmer, who, seeing it all bloody, drove it off, thinking it had been digging up a lamb that he'd just buried. The poor homeless beast came sneaking back, so he told his men to get rid of it. Well, they got hold of it somehow —there was a hole in its neck that looked as if they'd used a pitchfork—and, mortally afraid of its biting them, but not liking, as they told me, to drown it, for fear the owner might come on them, they got a stake and a chain, and fastened it up, and left it in the water by the hay-stack where I found it. I had some conversation with that farmer. 'That's right,' he said, 'but who was to know? I couldn't have my sheep worried. The brute had blood on his muzzle. These curs do a

lot of harm when they've once been blooded. You can't run risks.'" Our friend cut viciously at a dandelion with his stick. "Run risks!" he broke out suddenly: "That was it—from beginning to end of that poor beast's sufferings, fear! From that fellow on the bicycle, afraid of the worry and expense, as soon as it showed signs of distemper, to myself and the man with the pitchfork—not one of us, I daresay, would have gone out of our way to do it a harm. But we felt fear, and so—by the law of self-preservation, or whatever you like—it all began, till there the poor thing was, with a battered head and a hole in its neck, ravenous with hunger, and too distraught even to lap my bread and milk. Yes, and there's something uncanny about a suffering animal—we sat watching it, and again we were afraid, looking at its eyes and the way it bit the air. Fear! It's the black godmother of all damnable things!"

Our friend bent down, crumpling and crumpling at his dog's ears. We, too, gazed at the ground, thinking of that poor lost puppy, and the horrible inevitability of all that happens, seeing men are what they are; thinking of all the foul doings in the world, whose black godmother is Fear.

"And what became of the poor dog?" one of us asked at last.

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"When," said our friend slowly, "I'd had my fill of watching, I covered it with a rug, took this fellow away with me, and went to bed. There was nothing else to do. At dawn I was awakened by three dreadful cries—not like a dog's at all. I hurried down. There was the poor beast—wriggled out from under the rug—stretched on its side, dead. This fellow of mine had followed me in, and he went and sat down by the body. When I spoke to him he just looked round, and wagged his tail along the ground, but would not come away; and there he sat till it was buried, very interested, but not sorry at all."

Our friend was silent, looking angrily at something in the distance.

And we, too, were silent, seeing in spirit that vigil of early morning: The thin, lifeless, sandy-coloured body, stretched on those red mats; and this black creature—now lying at our feet—propped on its haunches like the dog in "The Death of Procris," patient, curious, ungrieved, staring down at it with his bright, interested eyes.

1912.

III

A FISHER OF MEN

ONG ago it is, now, that I used to see him issue from the rectory, followed by his dogs, an Irish and a fox terrier. He would cross to the churchyard, and, at the gate, stand looking over the Cornish upland of his cure of souls, towards the sea, distant nearly a mile. About his black thin figure there was one bright spot, a little gold cross, dangling on his vest. His eyes at such moments were like the eyes of fishermen watching from the cliffs for pilchards to come by; but as this fisher of men marked the grey roofs covered with yellow lichen where his human fishes dwelt, red stains would come into his meagre cheeks. His lips would move, and he would turn abruptly in at the gate over which was written: "This is the Gate of Heaven."

A certain green spot within that churchyard was kept clear of grave-stones, which thickly covered all the rest of the ground. He never—I believe—failed to look at it, and think: 'I will keep

that corner free. I will not be buried amongst men who refuse their God!'

For this was his misfortune, which, like a creeping fate, had come on him year by year throughout his twenty years of rectorship. It had eaten into his heart, as is the way with troubles which a man cannot understand. In plain words, his catch of souls had dwindled season by season till, from three hundred when he was first presented to the living, it barely numbered forty. Sunday after Sunday he had conducted his three services. Twice a week from the old pulpit, scanning through the church twilight that ever scantier flock of faces, he had in his dry, spasmodic voice—whose harsh tones, no doubt, were music to himself—pronounced this conduct blessed, and that accursed, in accordance with his creed. Week after week he had told us all the sinfulness of not attending God's House, of not observing the Lord's Day. He had respected every proper ritual and ceremony; never refusing baptism even to the illegitimate, nor burial to any but such as took their own lives; joining in marriage with a certain exceptional alacrity those whose conduct had caused scandal in the village. His face had been set, too, against irreverence; no one, I remember, might come to his church in flannel trousers.

Yet his flock had slowly diminished! Living,

unmarried, in the neglected rectory, with his dogs, an old housekeeper, and a canary, he seemed to have no interests, such as shooting, or fishing, to take him away from his parish duties; he asked nothing better than to enter the houses and lives of his parishioners; and as he passed their doors—spare, black, and clean-shaven—he could often be seen to stop, make, as it were, a minatory gesture, and walk on with his hungry eyes fixed straight before him. Year by year, to encourage them, he printed privately and distributed documents containing phrases such as these: "It were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea." "But the fearful and unbelieving shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone." When he wrote them, his eyes—I fancy—flared, as though watching such penalties in process of infliction. Had not his parishioners in justice merited those fates?

If, in his walks, he came across a truant, some fisherman or farmer, he would always stop, with his eyes fastened on the culprit's face:

"You don't come to church now; how's that?"

Like true Cornishmen, hoping to avoid unpleasantness, they would offer some polite excuse: They didn't knaw ezactly, zur—the missus 'ad been ailin'; there was always somethin'—like—

that! This temporising with the devil never failed to make the rector's eyes blaze, or to elicit from him a short dry laugh: "You don't know what you're saying, man! You must be mad to think you can save your soul that way! This is a Christian country!"

Yet never after one of these encounters did he see the face of that parishioner in his church again. "Let un wait!" they would murmur, "tidden likely we'm gwine to his church t'be spoke to like dogs!"

But, indeed, had they been dogs, the rector would not have spoken to them like that. To dogs his conduct was invariably gentle. He might be seen sometimes beside a field of standing corn, where the heads of his two terriers could be marked spasmodically emerging above the golden stalks, as they hunted a covey of partridges or brood of young pheasants which they had scented. His harsh voice could be heard calling them: "Jim, Jim! Pat, Pat! To heel, you rascals!" But when they came out, their tongues lolling ecstatically, he only stooped and shook his finger at them, and they would lick his hand, or rub themselves against his trousers, confident that he would never strike them. With every animal, with every bird and insect he was like this, so gentle that they trusted him completely.

He could often be surprised sitting on a high slate stile, or standing in a dip of the wide road between banks of gorse and bramble, with his head, in its wide hat, rather to one side, while a bullfinch or hedge-sparrow on a branch, not three feet off, would be telling him its little tale. Before going for a walk he would sweep his field-glass over the pale-gold landscape of corn-field, scorched pasturage and sand-dune, to see if any horse seemed needing water, or sheep were lying on its back. He was an avowed enemy, too, of traps and gins, and whenever he met with one, took pains to ensure its catching nothing. Such consistent tenderness to dumb animals was perhaps due to a desire to take their side against farmers who would not come to church; but more, I think, to the feeling that the poor things had no souls, that they were here to-day and gone to-morrow—they could not be saved and must be treated with compassion, unlike those men with immortal spirits entrusted by God specially to his care, for whose wanton disobedience no punishment, perhaps, could be too harsh. It was as if, by endowing him with Her authority over other men, the Church had divided him into two.

For the view he took of life was very simple, undisturbed by any sense of irony, unspoiled by

curiosity, or desire to link effect with cause, or indeed, to admit the necessity of cause at all. At some fixed date God had made the earth of matter; this matter He had divided into the inanimate and the animate, unconnected with each other; animate matter He had again divided into men, and animals; in men He had placed souls, making them in His own image. Men again He had divided into the Church and other men; and for the government and improvement of these other men God had passed Himself into His Church. That Church again had passed herself into her ministers. Thus, on the Church's minister—placed by Providence beyond the fear of being in the wrong—there had been enjoined the bounden duty of instructing, ruling, and saving at all costs, the souls of men.

This was why, I think, when he encountered in the simple folk committed to his charge a strange dumb democratic spirit, a wayward feeling that the Universe was indivisible, that power had not devolved, but had evolved, that things were relative, not absolute, and so forth—expressed in their simple way, he had experienced from the first a gnawing irritation which, like a worm, seemed to have cankered his heart. Gradually one had seen this canker stealing out into his face and body, into his eyes and voice, into the very gestures of his lean arms and hands. His

whole form gave the impression of a dark tree withered and eaten by some desiccating wind, like the stiff oaks of his Cornish upland, gnarled and riven by the Atlantic gales.

Night and day in the worn old rectory, with its red conservatory, he must have brooded over the wrong done him by his people, in depriving him of his just due, the power to save their souls. It was as though an officer, gagged and bound at the head of his company, should have been forced to watch them manœuvring without him. He was like a school-master tied to his desk amongst the pandemonium of his scholars. His failure was a fact strange and intolerable to him, inexplicable, tragic—a fact mured up in the mystery which each man's blindness to the nature of his own spirit wraps round his relations with his fellow beings. He could not doubt that, bereaved by their own wilful conduct of his ministrations, of the Church in fact, and, through the Church, of God, his parishioners were given up to damnation. If they were thus given up to damnation, he, their proper pastor—their rightful leader, the symbol of the Church, that is of God—was but a barren, withered thing. This thought he could not bear. Unable to see himself as others saw him, he searched to find excuses for them. He found none; for he knew that he had preached no narrow doctrines cursed with the bigotry which he

recognised in the Romish or Nonconformist faiths. The doctrines and dogmas he was appointed to administer were of the due and necessary breadth, no more, no less. He was scrupulous, even against his own personal feeling, to observe the letter of the encyclicals. Thus, nothing in the matter of his teaching could account for the gradual defection of his flock. Nor in the manner of it could he detect anything that seemed to himself unjustified. Yet, as the tide ebbed from the base of the grey cliffs, so, without haste, with deadly certainty, the tide ebbed from his church. What could he, then, believe but that his parishioners meant to be personally offensive to himself?

In the school-house, at the post office, on the green, at choir practice, or on the way to service, wherever he met them, one could see that he was perpetually detecting small slights or incivilities. He had come, I think, almost to imagine that these people, who never came to church, fixed the hours of their births and deaths and marriages maliciously, that they might mock at the inconvenience caused to one who neither could, nor would, refuse to do his duty. It was blasphemy they were committing. In avoiding God's church, yet requiring such services of His minister, they were making God their servant.

One could find him any evening in his study, his chin resting on his hand, the oil-lamp flaring slightly, his dogs curled up beside him, and the cloth cover drawn over the cage of his canary so that the little creature should not suffer from the light. Almost the first words he spoke would show how ceaselessly he brooded. "Nothing," he would say, "ever prospers in this village; I've started this and that! Look at the football club, look at the Bible class—all no good! With people such as these, wanting in all reverence, humility, and love of discipline! You have not had the dealings with them that I have!"

In truth his dealings with them had become notorious throughout the district. A petition, privately subscribed, and presented to the bishop for his removal had, of course, met with failure. A rector could not be removed from his living for any reason—it had been purchased for him by his father. Nor could his position as minister be interfered with on any such excuse as that of the mere personal dislike of his parishioners—as well, indeed, seek by petition to remove the Church herself. The knowledge of his unassailable position found expression among his parishioners in dogged looks, and the words: "Well, we don' trouble!"

It was in the twentieth year of his rectorship

that a slight collision with the parish council drew from him this letter: "It is my duty to record my intention to attend no more meetings, for I cannot, as a Christian, continue to meet those who obstinately refuse to come to church."

It was then late September, and the harvest festival had been appointed for the following Sunday. The week passed, but the farmers had provided no offerings for the decoration of the church; the fishermen too, accustomed by an old tradition in that parish to supply some purchased fruit in lieu of their shining fishes, sent nothing. The boycott had obviously been preconcerted.

But when the rector stepped that Sunday into the pulpit the church was fuller than it had been for many years. Men and women who had long ceased to attend, had come, possessed evidently by an itch to see how "th' old man" would take it. The eyes of the farmers and fishermen, hardened by the elements, had in them a grim humorous curiosity, such as one may remark in the eyes of a ring of men round some poor wretch, whom, moved by a crude sense of justice, they have baited into the loss of dignity. Their faces, with hardly an exception, seemed to say: "Sir, we were given neither hand nor voice in the choosing of you. From the first day you showed

us the cloven hoof. We have never wanted you. If we must have you, let us at all events get some sport out of you!"

The rector's white figure rising from the dark pulpit received without movement the shafts of all our glances; his own deep-set hungering eyes were fixed on the Bible in his hand. He gave out his text: "The kindly fruits of the earth, in due season——"

His voice—strangely smooth and low that morning, I remember—began discoursing of the beneficence and kindliness of God, who had allowed the earth to provide men year by year with food, according to their needs. It was as though the mellow sentiment of that season of fruition had fallen on his exiled spirit. But presently he paused, and leaning forward, looked man by man, woman by woman, at us all. Those eyes now had in them the peculiar flare which we knew so well. His voice rose again: "And how have you met this benefaction, my brethren, how have you shown your gratitude to God, embodied in His Church and in me, Her appointed representative? Do you think, then, that God will let you insult Him with impunity? Do you think in your foolish pride that God will suffer you unpunished to place this conspired slight on Him? If you imagine this, you are woefully mistaken. I know

the depths of your rebellious hearts; I read them like this Book. You seek, you have always sought, to set my authority at defiance—a wayward and disobedient generation. But let me tell you: God, who has set His Holy Church over you, is a just and strong God; as a kind master chastises his dogs for their own good, so will He chastise you. You have sought to drive me out from among you—" and from his pale twisting lips, through the hush, there came a sound like a laugh—"to drive the Church, to drive God Himself, away! You could not have made a grosser error. Do you think that we, in solemn charge of your salvation, are to be moved by such puerile rebellion? Not so! God has appointed us, to God alone we are accountable. Not if every man and woman in the parish, aye, and every child, deserted this church, would I recoil one step from my duty, or resign my charge! As well imagine, forsooth, that your great Church is some poor man-elected leader, subject to your whims, and to be deposed as the fancy takes you! Do you conceive the nature of the Church and of my office to be so mean and petty that I am to feed you with the food you wish me to feed you with, to lead you into such fields as you dictate? No! my brethren, you have not that power! Is the shepherd elected by the sheep? Listen then to the

truth, or to your peril be it! The Church is a rock set up by God amongst the shifting sands of life. It comes from Heaven, not from this miserable earth. Its mission is to command, yours to obey. If the last man in this Christian country proved a rebel and a traitor, the Church and her ministers would stand immovable, as I stand here, firm in my sacred resolve to save your souls. Go down on your knees, and beg God to forgive you for the wanton insult you have offered Him! . . . Hymn 266: 'Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom!'"

Through the grey aisles, where so great a silence reigned, the notes of the organ rose. The first verse of that hymn was sung only by the choir and a few women's voices; then one by one the men joined in. Our voices swelled into a shout louder than we had ever heard in the little church before—a mutinous, harsh, roaring sound, as though, in the words of that gentle hymn, each one of this grim congregation were pouring out all the resentment in his heart. The roar emerging through the open door must have startled the passing tourists, and the geese in the neighbouring farmyard. It ended with a groan like the long-drawn sob of a wave sucking back.

In the village all the next week little except this sermon was discussed. Farmers and fisher-

men are men of the world. The conditions of their lives, which are guarded only by their own unremitting efforts, which are backed by no authority save their own courage in the long struggle with land and sea, gives them a certain deep philosophy. Amongst the fishermen there was one white-bearded old fellow who even seemed to see a deep significance in the rector's sermon. "Mun putts hissel' above us, like the Czar o' Roossia," he said, "'tes the sperrit o' the thing that's wrong. Talk o' lovin' kindness, there's none 'bout the Church, 'sfar's I can see, 'tes all: 'Du this, or ye'll be blasted!' This man—he's a regular chip o' the old block!" He spoke, indeed, as though the rector's attitude towards them were a symbol of the Church's attitude to men. Among the farmers such analogies were veiled by the expression of simpler thoughts:

"Yu med tak' a 'arse to the watter, yu can't mak' un drink!"

"Whu wants mun, savin' our souls! Let mun save's own!"

"We'm not gude enough to listen to his prachin', I rackon!"

It was before a congregation consisting of his clerk, two tourists, three old women, one of them stone deaf, and four little girls, that the unfortunate man stood next Sunday morning.

Late that same wild and windy afternoon a jeering rumour spread down in the village: "Th' old man's up to Tresellyn 'Igh Cliff, talkin' to the watters!"

A crowd soon gathered, eager for the least sensation that should break monotony. Beyond the combe, above the grey roofs of the fishing village, Tresellyn High Cliff rises abruptly. At the top, on the very edge, the tiny black shape of a man could be seen standing with his arms raised above his head. Now he kneeled, then stood motionless for many minutes with hands outstretched; while behind him, the white and brown specks of his two terriers were visible, couched along the short grass. Suddenly he could be seen gesticulating wildly, and the speck shapes of the dogs leaping up, and cowering again as if terrified at their master's conduct.

For two hours this fantastic show was witnessed by the villagers with gloating gravity. The general verdict was: "Th' old man's carryin' on praaperly." But very gradually the sight of that tiny black figure appealing to his God—the God of his Church militant which lived by domination—roused the superstition of men who themselves were living in primitive conflict with the elements. They could not but appreciate what was so in keeping with the vengeful spirit of a

fighting race. One could see that they even began to be afraid. Then a great burst of rain, sweeping from the sea, smothered all sight of him.

Early next morning the news spread that the rector had been found in his arm-chair, the two dogs at his feet, and the canary perched on his dead hand. His clothes were unchanged and wet, as if he had sunk into that chair, and passed away, from sheer exhaustion. The body of "the poor unfortunate gentleman"—the old housekeeper told me—was huddled and shrunk together; his chin rested on the little gold cross dangling on his vest.

They buried him in that green spot, apart from his parishioners, which he had selected for his grave, placing on the tombstone these words:

HIC JACET

P——— W———

PASTOR ECCLESIÆ BRITANNICÆ

"GOD IS LOVE"

1908.

IV

THE PRISONER

ON a fine day of early summer in a London garden, before the birds had lost their Spring song, or the trees dropped their last blossoms, our friend said suddenly:

"Why! there's a goldfinch!" Blackbirds there were, and thrushes, and tits in plenty, an owl at night, and a Christopher Columbus of a cuckoo, who solemnly, once a year, mistook this green island of trees for the main lands of Kent and Surrey, but a goldfinch—never!

"I hear it—over there!" he said again, and, getting up, he walked towards the house.

When he came back, our friend sat down again, and observed:

"I didn't know that you kept a cage-bird!" We admitted that our cook had a canary.

"A mule!" he remarked, very shortly.

Some strong feeling had evidently been aroused in him that neither of us could understand.

Suddenly he burst out:

"I can't bear things in cages; animals, birds,

or men. I hate to see or think of them." And looking at us angrily, as though we had taken an advantage in drawing from him this confession, he went on quickly:

"I was staying in a German town some years ago, with a friend who was making inquiries into social matters. He asked me one day to go over a prison with him. I had never seen one, then, and I agreed. It was just such a day as this—a perfectly clear sky, and there was that cool, dancing sparkle on everything that you only see in some parts of Germany. This prison, which stood in the middle of the town, was one of those shaped like a star, that have been built over there on the plan of Pentonville. The system, they told us, was the same that you might have seen working here many years ago. The Germans were then, and still, no doubt, are, infatuated with the idea of muring their prisoners up in complete solitude. But it was a new toy to them then, and they were enjoying it with that sort of fanatical thoroughness which the Germans give to everything they take up. I don't want to describe this prison, or what we saw in it; as far as an institution run on such dreadful lines can be, it was, I daresay, well-managed; the Governor, at all events, impressed me favourably. I'll simply tell you of the one thing which I shall never forget,

because it symbolised to me for ever the caging of all creatures, animal or human, great or small."

Our friend paused; then, with an added irritation in his voice, as though aware of doing violence to his natural reserve, he went on:

"We had been all over the grizzly place when the Governor asked my friend whether he would like to see one or two of the 'life' prisoners."

"'I will show you one,' he said, 'who has been here twenty-seven years. He is, you will understand'—I remember his very words—'a little worn by his long confinement.' While we were going towards this prisoner's cell, they told us his story. He had been a cabinet-maker's assistant, and when still quite a boy, joined a gang of burglars to rob his own employer. Surprised during the robbery, he had blindly struck out, and killed his employer on the spot. He was sentenced to death, but, on the intervention of some Royalty who had been upset by the sight of corpses, I believe at the battle of Sadowa, his sentence was commuted to imprisonment for life.

"When we entered his cell he was standing perfectly still, gazing at his work. He looked quite sixty, though he could not have been more than forty-six—a bent, trembling ruin of a figure, covered by a drab-coloured apron. His face had

the mealy hue and texture of all prisoners' faces. He seemed to have no features; his cheeks were hollow; his eyes large, but, looking back, I can't remember their colour—if, indeed, they had colour in them at all. As we passed in, one by one, through the iron door, he took off his round cap, drab-coloured too, like everything about him, showing his dusty, nearly bald head, with a few short grey hairs on end, and stood in an attitude of 'attention,' humbly staring at us. He was like an owl surprised by daylight. Have you ever seen a little child ill for the first time—full of bewilderment at its own suffering? His face was like that, but so extraordinarily gentle! We had seen many of the prisoners, and he was the only one that had that awful *gentleness*. The sound of his voice, too: '*Ja, Herr Direktor—nein, Herr Direktor!*' soft and despairing—I remember it now—there was not a breath of will-power left." Our friend paused, frowning in his effort to re-create the scene. "He held in his hand," he went on presently, "a sheet of stiff paper, on which he had been transcribing the New Testament in letters from a code of writing for the deaf and dumb. When he passed his thin fingers over the type to show us how easily the deaf and dumb could read it, you could see that his hands were dusty like a miller's. There was nothing in the cell to produce

that dust, and in my belief it was not dust on his hands, but some excretion from that human plant running to seed. When he held the sheet of paper up, too, it trembled like the wing of an insect. One of us asked, who invented the system he was working at, mentioning some name. '*Nein, nein,*' he said, and he stood shivering with eagerness to recollect the right name. At last he drooped his head, and mumbled out: '*Ah, Herr Direktor, ich kann nicht!*' Then all of a sudden the name came bursting from his lips. At that moment, for the first time, he actually looked like a man. I never before then realised the value of freedom; the real meaning of our relations with other human beings; the necessity for the mind's being burnished from minute to minute by sights and sounds, by the need for remembering and using what we remember. This fellow, you see, had no use for memory in his life; he was like a plant placed where no dew can possibly fall on it. To watch that look pass over his face at the mere remembrance of a name was like catching sight of a tiny scrap of green leaf left in the heart of a withered shrub. Man, I tell you, is wonderful —the most enduring creature that has ever been produced!" Our friend rose, and began pacing up and down. "His world was not a large one; about fourteen feet by eight. He'd lived in it for

twenty-seven years, without a mouse even for a friend. They do things thoroughly in prisons. Think of the tremendous vital force that must go to the making of the human organism, for a man to live through that. . . . What do you imagine," he went on, turning to us suddenly, "kept even a remnant of his reason alive?—Well, I'll tell you: While we were still looking at his 'deaf and dumb' writing, he suddenly handed us a piece of wood about the size of a large photograph. It was the picture of a young girl, seated in the very centre of a garden, with bright-coloured flowers in her hand; in the background was a narrow, twisting stream with some rushes, and a queer bird, rather like a raven, standing on the bank. And by the side of the girl a tree with large hanging fruits, strangely symmetrical, unlike any tree that ever grew, yet with something in it that is in all trees, a look as if they had spirits, and were the friends of man. The girl was staring straight at us with perfectly round, blue eyes, and the flowers she held in her hand seemed also to stare at us. The whole picture, it appeared to me, was full of—what shall I say?—a kind of wonder. It had all the crude colour and drawing of an early Italian painting, the same look of difficulty conquered by sheer devotion. One of us asked him if he had learnt to draw before his imprisonment;

but the poor fellow misunderstood the question. '*Nein, nein,*' he said, 'the Herr Direktor knows I had no model. It is a fancy picture!' And the smile he gave us would have made a devil weep! He had put into that picture all that his soul longed for—woman, flowers, birds, trees, blue sky, running water; and all the wonder of his spirit that he was cut off from them. He had been at work on it, they said, for eighteen years, destroying and repeating, until he had produced this, the hundredth version. It was a masterpiece. Yes, there he had been for twenty-seven years, condemned for life to this living death—without scent, sight, hearing, or touch of any natural object, without even the memory of them, evolving from his starved soul this vision of a young girl with eyes full of wonder, and flowers in her hand. It's the greatest triumph of the human spirit, and the greatest testimony to the power of Art that I have ever seen."

Our friend uttered a short laugh: "So thick-skinned, however, is a man's mind that I didn't even then grasp the agony of that man's life. But I did later. I happened to see his eyes as he was trying to answer some question of the Governor's about his health. To my dying day I shall never forget them. They were incarnate tragedy—all those eternities of solitude and silence he had

lived through, all the eternities he had still to live through before they buried him in the graveyard outside, were staring out of them. They had more sheer pitiful misery in them than all the eyes put together of all the free men I've ever seen. I couldn't stand the sight of them, and hurried out of the cell. I felt then, and ever since, what they say the Russians feel—for all their lapses into savagery—the sacredness of suffering. I felt that we ought all of us to have bowed down before him; that I, though I was free and righteous, was a charlatan and sinner in the face of that living crucifixion. Whatever crime he had committed—I don't care what it was—that poor lost creature had been so sinned against that I was as dirt beneath his feet. When I think of him—there still, for all I know—I feel a sort of frenzy rising in me against my own kind. I feel the miserable aching of all the caged creatures in the world."

Our friend turned his head away, and for quite a minute did not speak. "On our way back, I remember," he said at last, "we drove through the Stadt Park. There, it was free and light enough; every kind of tree—limes, copper beeches, oaks, sycamores, poplars, birches, and apple trees in blossom, were giving out their scent; every branch and leaf was glistening with happiness. The place was full of birds, the symbols of free-

dom, fluttering about, singing their loudest in the sun. Yes, it was all enchanted ground. And I well remember thinking that in the whole range of Nature only men and spiders torture other creatures in that long-drawn-out kind of way; and only men do it in cold blood to their own species. So far as I know that's a fact of natural history; and I can tell you that to see, once for all, as I did, in that man's eyes, its unutterable misery, is never to feel the same towards your own kind again. That night I sat in a *café* window, listening to the music, the talk, the laughter, watching the people pass in the street—shop-folk, soldiers, merchants, officials, priests, beggars, aristocrats, women of pleasure, and the light streaming out from the windows, and the leaves just moving against the most wonderful, dark blue sky. But I saw and heard nothing of it all. I only saw the gentle, mealy-coloured face of that poor fellow, his eyes, and his dusty, trembling hands, and I saw the picture that he had painted there in hell. I've seen it ever since, whenever I see or hear of any sort of solitary caged creature."

Our friend ceased speaking, and very soon after he rose, excused himself, and went away.

1909.

V

COURAGE

AT that time (said Ferrand) I was in poverty. Not the kind of poverty that goes without dinner, but the sort that goes without breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and exists as it can on bread and tobacco. I lived in one of those fourpenny lodging-houses, Westminster way. Three, five, seven beds in a room; if you pay regularly, you keep your own bed; if not, they put some one else there who will certainly leave you a memento of himself. It's not the foreigners' quarter; they are nearly all English, and drunkards. Three-quarters of them don't eat—can't; they have no capacity for solid food. They drink and drink. They're not worth wasting your money on —cab-runners, newspaper-boys, sellers of laces, and what you call sandwich-men; three-fourths of them brutalised beyond the power of recovery. What can you expect? They just live to scrape enough together to keep their souls in their bodies; they have no time or strength to think of

anything but that. They come back at night and fall asleep—and how dead that sleep is! No, they never eat—just a bit of bread; the rest is drink!

There used to come to that house a little Frenchman, with a yellow, crow's-footed face; not old either, about thirty. But his life had been hard—no one comes to these houses if life is soft; especially no Frenchman; a Frenchman hates to leave his country. He came to shave us—charged a penny; most of us forgot to pay him, so that in all he shaved about three for a penny. He went to others of these houses—this gave him his income—he kept the little shop next door, too, but he never sold anything. How he worked! He also went to one of your Public Institutions; this was not so profitable, for there he was paid a penny for ten shaves. He used to say to me, moving his tired fingers like little yellow sticks: "Pff! I slave! To gain a penny, friend, I'm spending fourpence. What would you have? One must nourish oneself to have the strength to shave ten people for a penny." He was like an ant, running round and round in his little hole, without any chance but just to live; and always in hopes of saving enough to take him back to France, and set him up there. We had a liking for each other. He was the only one, in fact—except a sandwich-man who had been an actor, and was very intelligent,

when he wasn't drunk—the only one in all that warren who had ideas. He was fond of pleasure and loved his music-hall—must have gone at least twice a year, and was always talking of it. He had little knowledge of its joys, it's true—hadn't the money for that, but his intentions were good. He used to keep me till the last, and shave me slowly.

"This rests me," he would say. It was amusement for me, too, for I had got into the habit of going for days without opening my lips. It's only a man here and there one can talk with; the rest only laugh; you seem to them a fool, a freak—something that should be put into a cage or tied by the leg.

"Yes," the little man would say, "when I came here first I thought I should soon go back, but now I'm not so sure. I'm losing my illusions. Money has wings, but it's not to *me* it flies. Believe me, friend, I am shaving my soul into these specimens. And how unhappy they are, poor creatures; how they must suffer! Drink! you say. Yes, that saves them—they get a little happiness from that. Unfortunately, I haven't the constitution for it—here." And he would show me where he had no constitution. "You, too, comrade, you don't seem to be in luck; but then, you're young. Ah, well, *faut être philosophe*—but imagine what

kind of a game it is in this climate, especially if you come from the South!"

When I went away, which was as soon as I had nothing left to pawn, he gave me money—there's no question of lending in those houses: if a man parts with money he *gives* it; and lucky if he's not robbed into the bargain. There are fellows there who watch for a new pair of shoes, or a good overcoat, profit by their wakefulness as soon as the other is asleep, and promptly disappear. There's no morality in the face of destitution—it needs a man of iron, and these are men of straw. But one thing I will say of the low English—they are not bloodthirsty, like the low French and Italians.

Well, I got a job as fireman on a steamer, made a tour tramping, and six months later I was back again. The first morning I saw the Frenchman. It was shaving-day; he was more like an ant than ever, working away with all his legs and arms; a little yellower, and perhaps more wrinkled.

"Ah!" he called out to me in French, "there you are—back again. I knew you'd come. Wait till I've finished with this specimen—I've a lot to talk about."

We went into the kitchen, a big stone-floored room, with tables for eating—and sat down by the fire. It was January, but, summer or winter, there's always a fire burning in that kitchen.

"So," he said, "you have come back? No luck? Eh! Patience! A few more days won't kill you at your age. What fogs, though! You see, I'm still here, but my comrade, Pigon, is dead. You remember him—the big man with black hair who had the shop down the street. Amiable fellow, good friend to me; and married. Fine woman his wife—a little ripe, seeing she has had children, but of good family. He died suddenly of heart disease. Wait a bit; I'll tell you about that. . . .

"It was not long after you went away, one fine day in October, when I had just finished with these specimens here, and was taking my coffee in the shop, and thinking of that poor Pigon—dead then just three days—when *pom!* comes a knock, and there is Madame Pigon! Very calm—a woman of good family, well brought up, well made—fine woman. But the cheeks pale, and the eyes so red, poor soul.

"'Well, Madame,' I asked her, 'what can I do for you?'

"It seems this poor Pigon died bankrupt; there was not a cent in the shop. He was two days in his grave, and the bailiffs in already.

"'Ah, Monsieur!' she says to me, 'what am I to do?'

"'Wait a bit, Madame!' I get my hat and go back to the shop with her.

"What a scene! Two bailiffs, who would have been the better for a shave, sitting in a shop before the basins; and everywhere, *ma foi*, everywhere, children! Tk! Tk! A little girl of ten, very like her mother; two little boys with little trousers, and one with nothing but a chemise; and others—two, quite small, all rolling on the floor; and what a horrible noise!—all crying, all but the little girl, fit to break themselves in two. The bailiffs seemed perplexed. It was enough to make one weep! Seven! some quite small! That poor Pigon, I had no idea he was so good a rabbit!

"The bailiffs behaved very well.

"'Well,' said the biggest, 'you can have four-and-twenty hours to find this money; my mate can camp out here in the shop—we don't want to be hard on you!'

"I helped Madame to soothe the children.

"'If I had the money,' I said, 'it should be at your service, Madame—in each well-born heart there should exist humanity; but I have no money. Try and think whether you have no friends to help you.'

"'Monsieur,' she answered, 'I have none. Have I had time to make friends—I, with seven children?'

"'But in France, Madame?'

"'None, Monsieur. I have quarrelled with my family; and reflect—it is now seven years since we came to England, and then only because no one would help us.' That seemed to me bad, but what could I do? I could only say——

"'Hope always, Madame—trust in me!'

"I went away. All day long I thought how calm she was—magnificent! And I kept saying to myself: 'Come, tap your head! tap your head! Something must be done!' But nothing came.

"The next morning it was my day to go to that sacred Institution, and I started off still thinking what on earth could be done for the poor woman; it was as if the little ones had got hold of my legs and were dragging at me. I arrived late, and, to make up time, I shaved them as I have never shaved them; a hot morning—I perspired! Ten for a penny! Ten for a penny! I thought of that, and of the poor woman. At last I finished and sat down. I thought to myself: 'It's too strong! Why do you do it? It's stupid! You are wasting yourself!' And then, my idea came to me! I asked for the manager.

"'Monsieur,' I said, 'it is impossible for me to come here again.'

"'What do you mean?' says he.

"'I have had enough of your—"ten for a penny"—I am going to get married; I can't af-

ford to come here any longer. I lose too much flesh for the money.'

"'What?' he says, 'you're a lucky man if you can afford to throw away your money like this!'

"'Throw away my money! Pardon, Monsieur, but look at me'—I was still very hot—'for every penny I make I lose threepence, not counting the boot leather to and fro. While I was still a bachelor, Monsieur, it was my own affair—I could afford these extravagances; but now—it must finish—I have the honour, Monsieur!'

"I left him, and walked away. I went to the Pigons' shop. The bailiff was still there—Pfui! He must have been smoking all the time.

"'I can't give them much longer,' he said to me.

"'It is of no importance,' I replied; and I knocked, and went into the back room.

"The children were playing in the corner, that little girl, a heart of gold, watching them like a mother; and Madame at the table with a pair of old black gloves on her hands. My friend, I have never seen such a face—calm, but so pale, so frightfully discouraged, so overwhelmed. One would say she was waiting for her death. It was bad, it was bad—with the winter coming on!

"'Good morning, Madame,' I said. 'What news? Have you been able to arrange anything?'

"'No, Monsieur. And you?'

"'No!' And I looked at her again—a fine woman; ah! a fine woman.

"'But,' I said, 'an idea has come to me this morning. Now, what would you say if I asked you to marry me? It might possibly be better than nothing.'

"She regarded me with her black eyes, and answered——

"'But willingly, Monsieur!' and then, comrade, but not till then, she cried."

The little Frenchman stopped, and stared at me hard.

"H'm!" I said at last, "you have courage!"

He looked at me again; his eyes were troubled, as if I had paid him a bad compliment.

"You think so?" he said at last, and I saw that the thought was gnawing at him, as if I had turned the light on some desperate, dark feeling in his heart.

"Yes!" he said, taking his time, while his good yellow face wrinkled and wrinkled, and each wrinkle seemed to darken: "I was afraid of it even when I did it. Seven children!" Once more he looked at me: "And since!—sometimes—

sometimes—I could——" he broke off, then burst out again:

"Life is hard! What would you have? I knew her husband. Could I leave her to the streets?"

1904.

VI

THE PACK

T'S only," said H., "when men run in packs that they lose their sense of decency. At least that's my experience. Individual man—I'm not speaking of savages—is more given to generosity than meanness, rarely brutal, inclines in fact to be a gentleman. It's when you add three or four more to him that his sense of decency, his sense of personal responsibility, his private standards, go by the board. I am not at all sure that he does not become the victim of a certain infectious fever. Something physical takes place, I fancy . . . I happen to be a trustee, with three others, and we do a deal of cheese-paring in the year, which as private individuals we should never dream of."

"That's hardly a fair example," said D., "but on the whole, I quite agree. Single man is not an angel, collective man is a bit of a brute."

The discussion was carried on for several minutes, and then P., who had not yet spoken, said:

"They say a pinch of illustration is worth a pound of argument. When I was at the 'Varsity there was a man at the same college with me called Chalkcroft, the son of a high ecclesiastic, a perfectly harmless, well-mannered individual, who had the misfortune to be a Radical, or, as some even thought, a Socialist—anyway, he wore a turn-down collar, a green tie, took part in Union debates on the shady side, and no part in college festivities. He was, in fact, a 'smug'—a man, as you know, who, through some accident of his early environment, incomprehensibly fails to adopt the proper view of life. He was never drunk, not even pleasantly, played no games connected with a ball, was believed to be afraid of a horse or a woman, took his exercise in long walks with a man from another college, or solitarily in a skiff upon the river; he also read books, and was prepared to discuss abstract propositions. Thus, in one way or another he disgusted almost every self-respecting undergraduate. Don't imagine, of course, that his case was unusual; we had many such at M—— in my time; but about this Chalkcroft there was an unjustifiable composure, a quiet sarcasm, which made him conspicuously intolerable. He was thought to be a 'bit above himself,' or, rather, he did not seem conscious, as any proper 'smug' should, that he

was a bit below his fellows; on the contrary, his figure, which was slim, and slightly stooping, passed in and about college with serene assurance; his pale face with its traces of reprehensible whisker, wore a faint smile above his detested green tie; besides, he showed no signs of that poverty which is, of course, some justification to 'smugs' for their lack of conformity. And as a matter of fact, he was *not* poor, but had some of the best rooms in college, which was ever a remembered grievance against him. For these reasons, then," went on P., "it was decided one evening to bring him to trial. This salutary custom had originated in the mind of a third year man named Jefferies, a dark person with a kind of elephant-like unwieldiness in his nose and walk, a biting, witty tongue, and very small eyes with a lecherous expression. He is now a baronet. This gentleman in his cups had quite a pretty malice, and a sense of the dignity of the law. Wandering of a night in the quadrangles, he never had any difficulty in gathering a troop of fellows in search of distraction, or animated by public and other spirits; and, with them whooping and crowing at his heels, it was his beneficial practice to enter the rooms of any person, who for good and sufficient reasons merited trial, and thereupon to conduct the same with all the ceremony due to the dispen-

sation of British justice. I had attended one of these trials before, on a chuckle-headed youth whose buffoonery was really offensive. The ceremony was funny enough, nor did the youth seem to mind, grinning from ear to ear, and ejaculating continually, 'Oh! I say, Jefferies!'

"The occasion of which I am going to speak now was a different sort of affair altogether. We found the man Chalkcroft at home, reading before his fire by the light of three candles. The room was panelled in black oak, and the yellow candle flames barely lit up the darkness as we came whooping in.

"'Chalkcroft,' said Jefferies, 'we are going to try you.' Chalkcroft stood up and looked at us. He was in a Norfolk jacket, with his customary green tie, and his face was pale.

"He answered: 'Yes, Jefferies? You forgot to knock.'

"Jefferies put out his finger and thumb and delicately plucked Chalkcroft's tie from out of his waistcoat.

"'You wear a green tie, sir,' he said.

"Chalkcroft went the colour of the ashes in the grate; then, slowly, a white-hot glow came into his cheeks.

"'Don't look at me, sir,' said Jefferies; 'look at the jury!' and he waved his hand at us. 'We

are going to try you for——' He specified an incident of a scabrous character which served as the charge on all such humorous occasions, and was likely to be peculiarly offensive to 'smugs' who are usually, as you know, what is called 'pi.'

"We yelped, guffawed, and settled ourselves in chairs; Jefferies perched himself on a table and slowly swung his thin legs; he always wore very tight trousers. His little black eyes gleamed greedily above his unwieldy nose. Chalkcroft remained standing

"It was then," pursued P., "that I had my first qualm. The fellow was so still and pale and unmoved; he looked at me, and, when I tried to stare back, his eyes passed me over, quiet and contemptuous. And I remember thinking: 'Why are we all here—we are not a bit the kind of men to do this sort of thing?' And really we were not. With the exception of Jefferies, who was, no doubt, at times inhabited by a devil, and one Anderson, a little man in a long coat, with a red nose and very long arms, always half-drunk—a sort of desperate character, and long since, a schoolmaster—there wasn't one of us, who, left to himself, would have entered another man's rooms unbidden (however unpopular he might be, however much of a 'smug'), and insulted him to his face. There was Beal, a very fair, rather

good-looking man, with bowed legs and no expression to speak of, known as Boshy Beal; Dunsdale, a heavy, long-faced, freckled person, prominent in every college disturbance, but with a reputation for respectability; Horden (called Jos), a big, clean-cut Kentish man with nice eyes, and fists like hammers; Stickland, fussy, with mild habits; Sevenoax, now in the House of Lords; little Holingbroke, the cox; and my old schoolfellow, Fosdyke, whose dignity even then would certainly have forbidden his presence had he not previously dined. Thus, as you see, we were all or nearly all from the 'best' schools in the country, in the 'best' set at M——, and naturally, as individuals, quite—oh! quite—incapable of an ungentlemanlike act.

"Jefferies appointed Anderson gaoler, Dunsdale Public Prosecutor, no one counsel for the defence, the rest of us jury, himself judge, and opened the trial. He was, as I have said, a witty young man, and, dangling his legs, fastening his malevolent black eyes on Chalkcroft, he usurped the functions of us all. The nature of the charge precludes me from recounting to you the details of the trial, and, in fact, I have forgotten them, but as if he were standing here before us, I remember, in the dim glow of those three candles, Chalkcroft's pale, unmoved, ironic face; his un-

varying, 'Yes, Jefferies'; his one remonstrance: 'Are you a gentleman, Jefferies?' and our insane laughter at the answer: 'No, sir, a by-our-Lady judge.' As if he were standing here before us I remember the expression on his face at the question: 'Prisoner, are you guilty—yes or no?' the long pause, the slow, sarcastic: 'As you like, Jefferies.' As if he were standing here before us I remember his calm and his contempt. He was sentenced to drink a tumbler of his own port without stopping; whether the sentence was carried out I cannot tell you; for with one or two more I slipped away.

"The next morning I had such a sense of discomfort that I could not rest till I had sent Chalkcroft a letter of apology. I caught sight of him in the afternoon walking across the quad. with his usual pale assurance, and in the evening I received his answer. It contained, at the end, this sentence: 'I feel sure you would not have come if it hadn't been for the others.' It has occurred to me since that he may have said the same thing to us all—for anything I know, we may all of us have written."

There was a silence. Then H. said: "The Pack! Ah! What second-hand devil is it that gets into us when we run in packs?"

1905.

VII

COMPENSATION

IF, as you say (said Ferrand), there is compensation in this life for everything, do tell me where it comes in here.

Two years ago I was interpreter to an hotel in Ostend, and spent many hours on the Plage waiting for the steamers to bring sheep to my slaughter. There was a young man about, that year, who had a stall of cheap jewellery; I don't know his name, for among us he was called Tchuk-Tchuk; but I knew *him*—for we interpreters know everybody. He came from Southern Italy and called himself an Italian, but by birth he was probably an Algerian Jew; an intelligent boy, who knew that, except in England, it is far from profitable to be a Jew in these days. After seeing his nose and his beautiful head of frizzy hair, however, there was little more to be said on the subject. His clothes had been given him by an English tourist—a pair of flannel trousers, an old frock coat, a bowler hat. Incongruous? Yes, but

think, how cheap! The only thing that looked natural to him was his tie; he had unsewn the ends and wore it without a collar. He was little and thin, which was not surprising, for all he ate a day was half a pound of bread, or its equivalent in macaroni, with a little piece of cheese, and on a feast day a bit of sausage. In those clothes, which were made for a fat man, he had the appearance of a scarecrow with a fine, large head. These "Italians" are the Chinese of the West. The conditions of life down there being impossible, they are driven out like locusts or the old inhabitants of Central Asia—*a* regular invasion. In every country they have a kind of Society which helps them to make a start. When once provided with organs, jewellery, or whatever their profession, they live on nothing, drink nothing, spend no money. Smoke? Yes, they smoke; but you have to give them the tobacco. Sometimes they bring their women; more often they come alone—they make money more quickly without. The end they have in view is to scrape together a treasure of two or three hundred pounds and go back to Italy rich men. If you're accustomed to the Italian at home, it will astonish you to see how he works when he's out of his own country, and how provident he is—a regular Chinaman. Tchuk-Tchuk was alone, and he

worked like a slave. He was at his stand, day in, day out; if the sun burned, if there was a gale; he was often wet through, but no one could pass without receiving a smile from his teeth and a hand stretched out with some gimcrack or other. He always tried to impress the women, with whom he did most of his business—especially the *cocotterie*. Ah! how he looked at them with his great eyes! Temperamentally, I dare say, he was vicious enough; but, as you know, it costs money to be vicious, and he spent no money. His expenses were twopence a day for food and fourpence for his bed in a *café* full of other birds of his feather—sixpence a day, three shillings and sixpence a week. No other sort of human creature can keep this up long. My minimum is tenpence, which is not a bed of roses; but, then, I can't do without tobacco (to a man in extreme poverty a single vice is indispensable). But these "Italians" do without even that. Tchuk-Tchuk sold; not very hard work, you say? Try it for half an hour; try and sell something good—and Tchuk-Tchuk's things were rubbish—flash coral jewellery, Italian enamels made up into pins and brooches, celluloid gimcracks. In the evenings I've often seen him doze off from sheer fatigue, but always with his eyes half-open, like a cat. His soul was in his stall; he watched everything—but

only to sell his precious goods, for nothing interested him; he despised all the world around him —the people, the sea, the amusements; they were ridiculous and foreign. He had his stall, and he lived to sell. He was like a man shut up in a box —with not a pleasure, not a sympathy, nothing wherewith to touch this strange world in which he found himself.

"I'm of the South," he would say to me, jerking his head at the sea; "it's hard there. Over there I got a girl. She wouldn't be sorry to see me again; not too sorry! Over there one starves; name of a Saint" (he chose this form of oath, no doubt, because it sounded Christian), "it's hard there!"

I am not sentimental about Tchuk-Tchuk; he was an egoist to the bottom of his soul, but that did not in the least prevent his suffering for the want of his South, for the want of his sunshine, and his girl—the greater the egoism the greater the suffering. He craved like a dumb animal; but, as he remarked, "Over there one starves!" Naturally he had not waited for that. He had his hopes. "Wait a bit!" he used to say. "Last year I was in Brussels. Bad business! At the end they take away all my money for the Society, and give me this stall. This is all right—I make some money this season."

He had many clients among "women of morals," who had an eye for his beautiful head of hair, who know, too, that life is not all roses; and there was something pathetic in the persistency of Tchuk-Tchuk and the way his clothes hung about him like sacks; nor was he bad-looking, with his great black eyes and his slim, dirty hands.

One wet day I came on the Estacade when hardly a soul was there. Tchuk-Tchuk had covered his stall with a piece of old tarpaulin. He was smoking a long cigar

"Aha! Tchuk-Tchuk," I said, "smoking?"

"Yes," says he, "it's good!"

"Why not smoke every day, you miser; it would comfort you when you're hungry."

He shook his head. "Costs money," says he. "This one cost me nothing. A kind of an individual gave it me—a red-faced Englishman—said he couldn't smoke it. He knew nothing, the idiot—this is good, I tell you!"

But it was Tchuk-Tchuk who knew nothing—he had been too long without the means of knowledge. It was interesting to see the way he ate, drank, inhaled, and soaked up that rank cigar—a true revel of sensuality.

The end of the season came, and all of us birds who prey on the visitors were getting ready to

fly; but I stayed on, because I like the place—the gay-coloured houses, the smell of fish in the port, the good air, the long green seas, the dunes; there's something of it all in my blood, and I'm always sorry to leave. But after the season is over —as Tchuk-Tchuk would say—"Name of a saint —one starves over there!"

One evening, at the very end, when there were scarcely twenty visitors in the place, I went as usual to a certain *café*, with two compartments, where every one comes whose way of living is dubious—bullies, comedians, off-colour actresses, women of morals, "Turks," "Italians," "Greeks"—all such, in fact, as play the game of stealing—a regular rag-shop of cheats and gentlemen of industry—very interesting people, with whom I am well acquainted. Nearly every one had gone; so that evening there were but few of us in the restaurant, and in the inner room three Italians only. I passed into that.

Presently in came Tchuk-Tchuk, the first time I had ever seen him in a place where one could spend a little money. How thin he was, with his little body and his great head! One would have said he hadn't eaten for a week. A week? A year! Down he sat, and called for a bottle of wine; and at once he began to chatter and snap his fingers.

"Ha. ha!" says one of the Italians: "look at

Tchuk-Tchuk. What a nightingale he has become all of a sudden. Come, Tchuk-Tchuk, give us some of your wine, seeing you're in luck!"

Tchuk-Tchuk gave us of his wine, and ordered another bottle.

"Ho, ho!" says another Italian, "must have buried his family, this companion!" We drank—Tchuk-Tchuk faster than all. Do you know that sort of thirst, when you drink just to give you the feeling of having blood in the veins at all? Most people in that state can't stop—they drink themselves dead drunk. Tchuk-Tchuk was not like that. He was careful, as always, looking to his future. Oh! he kept his heart in hand; but in such cases a little goes a long way; he became cheerful—it doesn't take much to make an Italian cheerful who has been living for months on water and half-rations of bread and macaroni. It was evident, too, that he had reason to feel gay. He sang and laughed, and the other Italians sang and laughed with him. One of them said: "It seems our Tchuk-Tchuk has been doing good business. Come, Tchuk-Tchuk, tell us what you have made this season!"

But Tchuk-Tchuk only shook his head.

"Eh!" said the Italian, "the shy bird. It ought to be something good. As for me, comrades, honestly, five hundred francs is all I've made—not a

centime more—and the half of that goes to the patron."

And each of them began talking of his gains, except Tchuk-Tchuk, who showed his teeth, and kept silence.

"Come, Tchuk-Tchuk," said one, "don't be a bandit—a little frankness!"

"He won't beat my sixteen hundred!" said another.

"Name of a Saint!" said Tchuk-Tchuk suddenly, "what do you say to four thousand?"

But we all laughed.

"La, la!" said one, "he mocks us!"

Tchuk-Tchuk opened the front of his old frock-coat.

"Look!" he cried, and he pulled out four bills —each for a thousand francs. How we stared!

"See," said he, "what it is to be careful—I spend nothing—every cent is here! Now I go home—I get my girl; wish me good journey!" He set to work again to snap his fingers.

We stayed some time and drank another bottle, Tchuk-Tchuk paying. When we parted nobody was helpless, only, as I say, Tchuk-Tchuk on the road to the stars, as one is after a six months' fast. The next morning I was drinking a "bock" in the same *café*, for there was nothing else to do, when all of a sudden who should come

running in but this same Tchuk-Tchuk! Ah! but he was no longer on the road to the stars. He flung himself down at the table, with his head between his hands, and the tears rolled down his cheeks.

"They've robbed me," he cried, "robbed me of every sou; robbed me while I slept. I had it here, under my pillow; I slept on it; it's gone—every sou!" He beat his breast.

"Come, Tchuk-Tchuk," said I, "from under your pillow? That's not possible!"

"How do I know?" he groaned; "it's gone, I tell you—all my money, all my money. I was heavy with the wine——" All he could do was to repeat again and again—"All my money, all my money!"

"Have you been to the police?"

He had been to the police. I tried to console him, but without much effect, as you may imagine. The boy was beside himself.

The police did nothing—why should they? If he had been a Rothschild it would have been different, but seeing he was only a poor devil of an Italian who had lost his all——!

Tchuk-Tchuk had sold his stall, his stock, everything he had, the day before, so he had not even the money for a ticket to Brussels. He was obliged to walk. He started—and to this day I see

him starting, with his little hard hat on his beautiful black hair, and the unsewn ends of his tie. His face was like the face of the Devil thrown out of Eden!

What became of him I cannot say, but I do not see too clearly in all this the compensation of which you have been speaking.

And Ferrand was silent.

1904.

VIII

A MILLER OF DEE

MACCREEDY was respectable, but an outcast in his village.

There was nothing against him; on the contrary, he held the post of ferry-man to the people of the Manor, and nightly explained in the bar-parlour that if he had not looked sharp after his rights he would have been a salaried servant: "At a fixed wage, ye'll understand, without a chance to turn an honest penny."

He turned the honest pennies by exacting six-penny ferry tolls from every person who was not a member of the Manor family. His doctrine, preached nightly, was that the gentry were banded to destroy the rights of the poor; yet, in spite of this, which should have conferred on him popularity, he was subtly and mysteriously felt to be a spiritual alien. No one ever heard him object to this unwritten, unspoken verdict; no one knew, in fact, whether he was aware of it. On still evenings he could be seen sitting in his

boat in the Manor pool, under the high-wooded cliff, as if brooding over secret wrongs. He was a singer, too, with a single song, "The Miller of Dee," which he gave on all occasions; the effort of producing it lent his mouth a ludicrous twist under his whitey-brown moustache. People on the Manor terrace above could hear him sing it at night in an extraordinarily flat voice, as he crossed the river back to his cottage below.

No one knew quite where he came from, though some mentioned Ireland; others held a Scotch theory; and one man, who had an imagination, believed him to be of Icelandic origin. This mystery rankled in the breast of the village —the village of white cottages, with its soft, perpetual crown of smoke, and its hard north-country tongue. MacCreedy was close about money, too—no one knew whether he had much money or little.

Early one spring he petitioned for a holiday, and disappeared for a month. He returned with a wife, a young anæmic girl, speaking in a Southern accent. A rather interesting creature, this wife of MacCreedy, very silent, and with a manner that was unconsciously, and, as it were, ironically submissive.

On May mornings her slender figure, which looked as if it might suddenly snap off at the

waist, might be seen in the garden, hanging clothes out to dry, or stooping above the vegetables, while MacCreedy watched her in a possessive manner from the cottage doorway. Perhaps she symbolised victory to him, a victory over his loneliness; perhaps he only looked on her as more money in his stocking. She made no friends, for she was MacCreedy's wife, and a Southerner; moreover, MacCreedy did not want her to make friends. When he was out it was she who would pull the ferry-boat over, and, after landing the passengers, remain motionless, bowed over her sculls, staring after them, as though loth to lose the sound of their footsteps; then she would pull slowly back across the swirl of silver-brown water, and, tying up the boat, stand with her hand shading her eyes. MacCreedy still went to the "public" at nights, but he never spoke of his wife, and it was noticed that he stared hard with his pug's eyes at any one who asked after her. It was as though he suspected the village of wanting to take her from him. The same instinct that made him bury his money in a stocking bid him bury his wife. Nobody gave him anything, none should touch his property!

Summer ripened, flushed full, and passed; the fall began. The river came down ruddy with leaves, and often in the autumn damp the village

was lost in its soft mist of smoke. MacCreedy became less and less garrulous, he came to the "public" seldom, and in the middle of his drink would put his glass down, and leave, as though he had forgotten something. People said that Mrs. MacCreedy looked unhappy; she ceased to attend church on Sundays. MacCreedy himself had never attended.

One day it was announced in the village that Mrs. MacCreedy's mother was ill—that Mrs. MacCreedy had gone away to nurse her; and, in fact, her figure was no more seen about the cottage garden beneath the cliff. It became usual to ask MacCreedy about his mother-in-law, for the question seemed to annoy him. He would turn his head, give a vicious tug at the sculls, and answer, "Oh! aye, a wee bit better!"

Tired perhaps of answering this question, he gave up going to the "public" altogether, and every evening, when the shadows of the woods were closing thick on the water, he could be seen staring over the side of his boat moored in the deep backwater below his cottage; the sound of his favourite song was heard no more. People said: "He misses his wife!" and for the first time since he had been amongst them, a feeling for him almost amounting to warmth grew up in the village.

Early one morning, however, the under-keeper, who had an old-time grudge against MacCreedy, after an hour of patient toil, fished Mrs. MacCreedy up from the bottom of the backwater. She was neatly sewn in a sack, weighted with stones, and her face was black. They charged MacCreedy, who wept, and said nothing. He was removed to the County gaol.

At his trial he remained dumb, and was found guilty. It was proved among other things that Mrs. MacCreedy had no mother.

While he was waiting to be hanged, he asked for the chaplain, and made the following statement:—

"Parson," said he, "I'm not caring what ye have to say—ye will get plenty chance to talk when I'm gone. It's not to you I'm speaking, nor to anybody in particular—I'm just lonely here; it's a luxury to me to see a face that's not that gravy-eyed old warder's. I don't believe ye're any better than me, but if I did, what then? It's meself I've got to make me peace with. Man, d'ye think I'd have kept me independence if I'd ha' believed the likes of ye? They never had a good word for me down there, gentry as bad as the rest—the pack of fools! And why didn't they have a good word for me? Just because I'm an independent man. They'll tell ye that I was

close; stingy they'll call it—and why was I close? Because I knew they were all against me. Why should I give 'em anything? They were all waitin' to take it from me! They'll say I set no store by my wife; but that's a lie, parson—why, she was all I had! As sure as I'm speaking to ye, if I hadn't done what I did I'd have lost her. I was for guessing it all the autumn. I'm not one of those bodies that won't look a thing in the face; ye can't hoodwink me with palaver. I put it to ye, if ye had a diamond wouldn't ye a sight sooner pitch it into the sea, than have it stolen? Ye know ye would! Well, she's just dead; and so'll I be when they squeeze the life out of me. Parson, don't ye go and blabber about her doin' wrong. She never did wrong; hadn't the time to. I wouldn't have ye take away her reputation when I'm gone and can't defend her. But there was, aye! the certainty that she would 'a done it; 'twas coming, d'ye see? Aye! but I was bound to lose her; and I'll tell ye how I made sure.

"'Twas one day nigh the end of October; I emptied the ferry till, and I said to my wife: 'Jenny,' I said, 'ye'll do the ferry work to-day; I'm away to the town for a suit o' clothes. Ye will take care,' I said, 'that no one sneaks over without paying ye his proper saxpence.'

"'Very well, MacCreedy,' she says. With that

I put some bread and meat in a bit of paper, and had her ferry me across. Well, I went away up the road till I thought she would have got back; and then I turned round and came softly down again to the watter; but there she was, still sitting where I'd left her. I was put aback by that, parson; ye know what it is when your plans get upset. 'Jenny,' I said to her, as if I came for the very purpose, 'ye'll look sharp after them fares?'

"'Yes,' she says, 'MacCreedy.' And with that she turns the boat round. Well, presently I came down again, and hid in some bushes on the bank, and all day I stayed there watching. Have ye ever watched a rabbit trap? She put four people across the river, and every time I saw them pay her. But late in the afternoon that man—the devil himself, the same I was lookin' after—came down and called out 'Ferry!' My wife she brought the ferry over, and I watched her close when he stepped in. I saw them talking in the boat, and I saw him take her hands when he left it. There was nothing more to see, for he went away. I waited till evening, then out I crept and called 'Ferry!' My wife came down—she was aye ready—and fetched me across. The first thing I did was to go to the till and take out four saxpences. 'Oh,' I said, 'Jenny, ye've had four fares then?'

"'Yes,' she said, 'just four.'

"'Sure?' I said.

"'Sure,' she said, 'MacCreedy.'

"Have ye ever seen the eyes of a rabbit when the fox is nigh her?

"I asked her who they were, and when she told me the names of the first four, and never another name, I knew I'd lost her. She got to bed presently, and after she was in bed I waited, sitting by the fire. The question I put to meself was this: 'Will I let them have her? Will I let them tak' her away?' The sweat ran off me. I thought maybe she'd forgotten to name him, but there was her eyes; and then, where was his saxpence? In this life, parson, there's some things ye cannot get over.

"'No,' I said to meself, 'either ye've took up with him, or else ye're goin' to tak' up with him, or ye'd ha' had his saxpence.' I felt myself heavier than lead. 'Ye'd ha' had his saxpence,' I said to meself; 'ther's no gettin' over that.' I would have ye know that my wife was an obedient woman, she aye did what she was told, an' if it hadn't been for a vera good reason she'd ha' had his saxpence; there's no manner of doubt about it. I'm not one of those weak-minded bodies who believe that marriages are sacred; I'm an independent man. What I say is, every

man for himself, an' every woman too, and the less of cant the better. I don't want ye to have the chance to take away me reputation when I'm gone, with any such foolish talk. 'Twasn't the marriage; 'twas just the notion of their stealing her. I never owed any man of them a penny, or a good turn—him least of all; and was I to see them steal her and leave me bare? Just as they'd ha' stolen my saxpences; the very money out of me pocket, if I'd ha' let them. I ask ye, was I to do that? Was I to see meself going back to loneliness before me own eyes? 'No,' I said to meself; 'keep yourselves to yourselves, I'll keep meself to mine!' I went and took a look at her asleep, and I could fancy her with a smile as if she were glad to ha' done with me—going off with him to those others up at the village to make a mock of me. I thought, 'Ye've got to do something, MacCreedy, or ye'll just be helping them to steal her from yerself.' But what could I do? I'm a man that looks things through and through, and sees what's logical. There was only one logic to this; but, parson, I cried while I was putting the pillow to her face. She struggled very little, poor thing—she was aye an obedient woman. I sewed her body up in a sack, and all the time I thought: 'There goes MacCreedy!' But I cannot say that I regretted it exactly. Human nature's no so very

simple. 'Twas the hanging about the spot after, that was the ruin of me; if ye've got things valuable hidden up, ye're bound to hang around them, ye feel so lonely."

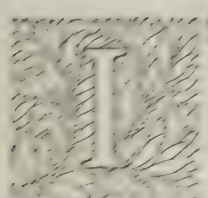
On the morning of his execution MacCreedy ate a good breakfast, and made a wan attempt to sing himself his favourite song:

> "I care for nobody—no, not I,
> And nobody cares for me!"

1903.

IX

THE NEIGHBOURS



In the remote country, Nature, at first sight so serene, so simple, will soon intrude on her observer a strange discordance, a feeling that some familiar spirit haunts the old lanes, rocks, wasteland, and trees, and has the power to twist all living things around into some special shape befitting its genius.

When moonlight floods the patch of moorland about the centre of the triangle between the little towns of Hartland, Torrington, and Holsworthy, a pagan spirit steals forth through the wan gorse, gliding round the trunk of the lonely, gibbet-like fir-trees, peeping out amongst the reeds of the white marsh. That spirit has the eyes of a border, who perceives in every man a possible foe. And in fact, this high corner of the land has remained border to this day, where the masterful, acquisitive invader from the North dwells side by side with the unstable, proud, quick-blooded Celt-Iberian.

In two cottages crowning some fallow land two families used to live side by side. That long white dwelling seemed all one, till the eye, peering through the sweet-brier which smothered the right-hand half, perceived the rude, weather-beaten presentment of a Running Horse, denoting the presence of intoxicating liquors; and in a window of the left-hand half, that strange conglomeration of edibles and shoe-leather which proclaims the one shop of a primitive hamlet.

These married couples were by name Sandford at the eastern, and Leman at the western end; and he who saw them for the first time thought: 'What splendid-looking people!'

They were all four above the average height, and all four as straight as darts. The innkeeper, Sandford, was a massive man, stolid, grave, light-eyed, with big fair moustaches, who might have stepped straight out of some Norseman's galley. Leman was lean and lathy, a regular Celt, with an amiable, shadowy, humorous face. The two women were as different as the men. Mrs. Sandford's fair, almost transparent cheeks coloured easily, her eyes were grey, her hair pale brown; Mrs. Leman's hair was of a lustreless jet-black, her eyes the colour of a peaty stream, and her cheeks had the close creamy texture of old ivory.

Those accustomed to their appearance soon

noted the qualifications of their splendour. In Sanford, whom neither sun nor wind ever tanned, there was a look as if nothing would ever turn him from acquisition of what he had set his heart on; his eyes had the idealism of the worshipper of property, ever marching towards a heaven of great possessions. Followed by his cowering spaniel, he walked to his fields (for he farmed as well as kept the inn) with a tread that seemed to shake the lanes, disengaging an air of such heavy and complete insulation that even the birds were still. He rarely spoke. He was not popular. He was feared, no one quite knew why.

On Mrs. Sandford, for all her pink and white, sometimes girlish look, he had set the mark of his slow, heavy domination. Her voice was seldom heard. Once in a while, however, her reserve would yield to garrulity, as of water flowing through a broken dam. In these outbursts she usually spoke of her neighbours the Lemans, deploring the state of their marital relations. "A woman," she would say, "must give way to a man sometimes; I've had to give way to Sandford myself, I have." Her lips, from long compression, had become thin as the edge of a teacup; all her character seemed to have been driven down below the surface of her long, china-white face. She had not broken, but she had chipped; her edges

had become jagged, sharp. The consciousness, that she herself had been beaten to the earth, seemed to inspire in her that waspish feeling towards Mrs. Leman—"a woman with a proud temper," as she would say in her almost lady-like voice; "a woman who's never bowed down to a man—that's what she'll tell you herself. 'Tisn't the drink that makes Leman behave so mad, 'tis because she won't give way to him. We're glad to sell drink to any one we can, of course; but 'tisn't that what's makin' Leman so queer. 'Tis her."

Leman, whose long figure was often to be seen seated on the wooden bench of his neighbour's stone-flagged little inn, had, indeed, begun to have the soaked look and scent of a man never quite drunk, and hardly ever sober. He spoke slowly, his tongue seemed thickening; he no longer worked; his humorous, amiable face had grown hangdog and clouded. All the village knew of his passionate outbreaks, and bursts of desperate weeping; and of two occasions when Sandford had been compelled to wrest a razor from him. People took a morbid interest in this rapid deterioration, speaking of it with misgiving and relish, unanimous in their opinion that—summat'd'appen about that; the drink wer duin' for George Leman, *that* it wer, praaperly!

But Sandford—that blond, ashy-looking Teuton—was not easy of approach, and no one cared to remonstrate with him; his taciturnity was too impressive, too impenetrable. Mrs. Leman, too, never complained. To see this black-haired woman, with her stoical, alluring face, come out for a breath of air, and stand in the sunlight, her baby in her arms, was to have looked on a very woman of the Britons. In conquering races the men, they say, are superior to the women, in conquered races, the women to the men. She was certainly superior to Leman. That woman might be bent and mangled, she could not be broken; her pride was too simple, too much a physical part of her. No one ever saw a word pass between her and Sandford. It was almost as if the old racial feelings of this borderland were pursuing in these two their unending conflict. For there they lived, side by side under the long, thatched roof, this great primitive, invading male, and that black-haired, lithe-limbed woman of older race, avoiding each other, never speaking—as much too much for their own mates as they were, perhaps, worthy of each other.

In this lonely parish, houses stood far apart, yet news travelled down the May-scented lanes and over the whin-covered moor with a strange speed; blown perhaps by the west wind, whis-

pered by the pagan genius of the place in his wanderings, or conveyed by small boys on large farm horses.

On Whit-Monday it was known that Leman had been drinking all Sunday; for he had been heard on Sunday night shouting out that his wife had robbed him, and that her children were not his. All next day he was seen sitting in the bar of the inn soaking steadily. Yet on Tuesday morning Mrs. Leman was serving in her shop as usual —a really noble figure, with that lustreless black hair of hers—very silent, and ever sweetening her eyes to her customers. Mrs. Sandford, in one of her bursts of garrulity, complained bitterly of the way her neighbours had "gone on" the night before. But unmoved, ashy, stolid as ever, Sandford worked in the most stony of his fields.

That hot, magnificent day wore to its end; a night of extraordinary beauty fell. In the gold moonlight the shadows of the lime-tree leaves lay, blacker than any velvet, piled one on the other at the foot of the little green. It was very warm. A cuckoo called on till nearly midnight. A great number of little moths were out; and the two broad meadows which fell away from the hamlet down to the stream were clothed in a glamorous haze of their own moonlit buttercups. Where that marvellous moonlight spread out across the moor

it was all pale witchery; only the three pine-trees had strength to resist the wan gold of their fair visitor, and brooded over the scene like the ghosts of three great gallows. The long white dwelling of "the neighbours," bathed in that vibrating glow, seemed to be exuding a refulgence of its own. Beyond the stream a night-jar hunted, whose fluttering harsh call tore the garment of the scent-laden still air. It was long before sleep folded her wings.

A little past twelve o'clock there was the sound of a double shot. By five o'clock next morning the news had already travelled far; and before seven, quite a concourse had gathered to watch two mounted constables take Leman on Sandford's pony to Bideford gaol. The dead bodies of Sandford and Mrs. Leman lay—so report ran—in the locked bedroom at Leman's end of the neighbours' house. Mrs. Sandford, in a state of collapse, was being nursed at a neighbouring cottage. The Leman children had been taken to the Rectory. Alone of the dwellers in those two cottages, Sandford's spaniel sat in a gleam of early sunlight under the eastern porch, with her nose fixed to the crack beneath the door.

It was vaguely known that Leman had "done for 'em"; of the how, the why, the when, all was conjecture. Nor was it till the assizes that the

story of that night was made plain, from Leman's own evidence, read from a dirty piece of paper:

"I, George Leman, make this confession—so help me God! When I came up to bed that evening, I was far gone in liquor and so had been for two days off and on, which Sandford knows. My wife was in bed. I went up, and I said to her: 'Get up!' I said; 'do what I tell you for once!' 'I will not!' she said. So I pulled the bedclothes off her. When I saw her all white like that, with her black hair, it turned me queer, and I ran downstairs and got my gun, and loaded it. When I came upstairs again, she was against the door. I pushed, and she pushed back. She didn't call out, or say one word—but pushed; she was never one to be afraid. I was the stronger, and I pushed-in the door. She stood up against the bed, defying me with her mouth tight shut, the way she had; and I put up my gun to shoot her. It was then that Sandford came running up the stairs and knocked the gun out of my hand with his stick. He hit me a blow over the heart with his fist, and I fell down against the wall, and couldn't move. And he said: 'Keep quiet!' he said, 'you dog!' Then he looked at her. 'And as for you,' he said, 'you bring it on yourself! You can't bow down, can't you? *I'll* bow you down for once!' And he took and raised his stick. But he didn't strike her,

he just looked at her in her nightdress, which was torn at the shoulders, and her black hair ragged. She never said a word, but smiled at him. Then he caught hold of her by the arms, and they stood there. I saw her eyes; they were black as two sloes. He seemed to go all weak of a sudden, and white as the wall. It was like as they were struggling which was the better of them, meaning to come to one another at the end. I saw what was in them as clear as I see this paper. I got up and crept round, and I took the gun and pointed it, and pulled the triggers one after the other, and they fell dead, first him, then her; they fell quietly, neither of them made a noise. I went out, and lay down on the grass. They found me there when they came to take me. This is all I have to write, but it is true that I was far gone in liquor, which I had of him . . ."

1909.

X

A REVERSION TO TYPE

E sat smoking after dinner in a country house. Some one was saying: "They're either too conceited, too much in earnest, too much after advertisement, too effeminate, or too dirty—I never found literary men amusing."

There was a murmur of approval, till a sallow man who had not spoken all the evening, except to ask for matches, emerged from the shadow of his chair . . .

"You're wrong," he said. "The most diverting thing I ever came across was in connection with two literary men. It happened some years ago at an Italian inn, in a place where there were ruins. I was travelling with poor B——, and at that inn we came across a literary man, a regular Classicist, looking up items for an historical romance. He was very good company—a prosperous, clever, satirical creature, who wore a moustache, and thought it wicked not to *change* for dinner. In spite of this he had his limitations—but we

all have *them*, even we sitting here. This inn was a queer place—at a crossing of two roads in the midst of brown hills—with blistered eucalyptus trees throwing ragged shadows on it, and two old boar-spears fastened up over the door. We were the only people there, and it was very hot. We used to dine outside the entrance, in the shade of the eucalyptus trees. There was a wonderful tap of wine; and after toiling over ruins in the sun all day, we used to punish it—the Classicist especially; it sharpened his wit and thickened his tongue. He was a man of culture, great believer in physical sports, and knew all about everybody's ancestors—was himself fifteen degrees removed from a murderer of Thomas A'Becket, and a friend of the champion tennis-player. We got on very well; he was quite amusing and affable.

"It was about sunset on the fourth evening when the other literary person turned up. He came just as we were going to dinner—a long, weedy fellow, slouching in under a knapsack, covered with dust, in a battered 'larrikin' hat, unshaved, with eyes as keen as sword-points, a lot of hair, and an emotional mouth, like a girl's. He sprawled down on a bench close to our table, unslung his pack, and appeared to lose himself in the sunset. When our host came out with the

soup, he asked for wine and a bed. B—— suggested that he should join us; he accepted, and sat down forthwith. I sat at one end, B—— opposite; this fellow and the Classicist, who wore a smoking jacket, and smelt tremendously of soap, faced each other. From the first moment it was a case of 'two of a trade.' The moment their eyes met, ironical smiles began wandering about their mouths. There was little enough talk till we had broached our third bottle. The Classicist was a noble drinker; this wild man of the ways a nobler, or perhaps more thirsty. I remember the first words they exchanged. The Classicist, in his superior, thick, satirical voice, was deploring 'the unmanly tricks' introduced nowadays into swordsmanship, to the detriment of its dignity and grace.

"'It would be interesting to know, sir,' said the other, 'when you're fighting for life, what is the good of those "tickle points of niceness"?' The Classicist looked at him: 'You would wish, I should imagine, to "play the game," sir?'

"'With my enemy's sword through the middle of me?'

"The Classicist answered: 'I should have thought it a matter of "good form"; however, if you don't feel that—of course——'

"'I have not the good fortune to be a swords-

man; but if I were, I should be concerned to express my soul with the point of my sword, not with attitudes.'

"'Noble aspiration!'

"'Just as I drink off at a draught this most excellent wine.'

"'Evidently you are not concerned with flavour?'

"'Its flavour, sir, is the feeling it gives me—Burn Academy, and all its works!'

"The Classicist turned to me elaborately and asked:

"'Do you know young D——, the author of ——? You ought to; there's no d—d nonsense about *him*.' The man on the other side of the table laid his soiled hand on his soiled chest. 'A hit. I feel honoured.'

"The Classicist continued his remarks. 'No "expressions of soul" and that sort of thing about D——!'

"'Oh! happy D——!' murmured our visitor. 'And is the happy D—— an artist in his writings?'

"The Classicist turned and rent him. 'He's a public school man, sir, and a gentleman, which, in my humble opinion, is much better.'

"The newcomer drank. 'That is very interesting. I must read D——. Has he given us any in-

formation about the inner meaning of life in public schools?'

"'No, sir, he is not a prig.'

"'Indeed! He must have English blood in him, this gentleman!'

"'He knows the meaning of "good form" anyway.'

"Our visitor clutched his glass and shook it in the air. 'Sir,' he said, 'with all my heart, with all my blood, I revolt against those words "good form"; I revolt against the commercial snobbery that underlies them; I revolt against the meanness and the Pharisaism of them; I revolt——' and still he went on shaking his glass and saying 'I revolt.'

"The Classicist ironically murmured: '*Sparge rosas! Inania verba!*'

"'No, sir; "winged words," that I will drive home with my last breath.'

"The Classicist smiled: 'An Emotional,' he began, 'an Emotional . . .'

"Gentlemen, it was time to interfere, so I upset the bottle. The wine streamed across the table. We ordered more. Darkness had gathered; the moon was rising; over the door the reflections of those old boar-spears branched sharp and long on the pale wall; they had an uncanny look, like cross-bones. How those two fellows disliked each

other! Whole centuries of antagonism glared out of their eyes. They seemed to sum up in some mysterious way all that's significant and opposed in the artist and the man of action. It was exceedingly funny. They were both learned pigs. But the ancestors of the one might from time immemorable have been burning and stamping on the other, and the ancestors of the other stabbing desperately up at the one. One represented a decent well-fed spirit of satisfaction with things as they are, and the other a ravening shade, whom centuries of starvation had engrained with strife. For all I know they may both have been the sons of chemists. But anyway, some instinct made each recognise the other as typical of what he had most cause to hate. Very obscure the reasons of such things—very obscure everything to do with origins!

"We ordered another bottle. Any other two men, having discovered such hostility, would have held their tongues; these couldn't—I have noticed it with members of their profession. The Emotionalist proposed a toast: 'I give you,' he said, 'the country most immersed in the slough of commercialism, the country that suffocates truth in its cradle with the smell of money, the country of snobs and stockjobbers!' He drank his own toast with enthusiasm; needless to say,

nobody else did. The Classicist showed the first signs of excitement. 'I give you,' he responded, 'the whipping of all high-falutin' upstarts!'

"'Good!' replied the other; 'I drink that too!' It again became necessary to upset something—a glass this time. Presently we tumbled somehow on the subject of the Sagas. Gentlemen, the Sagas were deep in the affections of both those fellows; and nothing could have better roused their hostility to boiling-point than this common affection. You could see it by their faces. To the one a Saga was the quintessence of sport, of manly valour, and aristocratic tyranny; to the other something lawless and beautiful, freedom in a mist of primitive emotions, a will-o'-the-wisp hovering over bogs, a draught of blood and wine.

"Have you ever noticed two men discussing a picture, a book, a person, which one loves and the other hates? What happens? Indifference or mutual contempt—nothing more. But let them chance on that which each loves; then you may cry 'havoc!'

"We left our chairs, and stood about, and in the moonlight those creatures talked. First one went to the table and drained his glass, then the other. Their words were as bitter as bitter, they kept closing and hastily recoiling. They were like

two men defending the honour of some woman who belonged to both of them—a priceless possession, which neither would abandon to the other. So, in the age of Sagas, a forbear of the one, some wild heathman, may have hewn a lord in sunder; or, in a foray, the other's ancestor trodden into the earth a turbulent churl. It was being done over again that evening—with words—by two lights of our high civilisation. B—— went to sleep. I woke him, and we left them disputing in the moonlight.

"And now, gentlemen, I come to the diverting part of my story. It may have been a quarter, it may have been half an hour after B—— and I had retired, when the landlord came to call us.

"There, in a pool of moonlight, shadows, blood, and wine, they lay—they had carved each other up with the boar-spears.

"The Classicist was quite dead, with a sneer on his face; the Emotionalist still lived, with a gash right through his chest. There was nothing to be learnt from him, however; before his death he fixed his eyes on me. I bent, thinking to hear words of remorse or terror. But all he said was:

"'The snob!' and died.

"They took alarm at the inn and wanted to smother it up. They called it fever. Well, gentle-

men, so it *was:* the ineradicable fever of type. A good many years ago. You must have seen it in the papers. . . ."

The sallow man was silent.

1901.

XI

A WOMAN

A TRAVELLER was writing to his friend: . . . "We were sitting on the *stoep*. Above the pines the long line of Table Mountain was like a violet shadow two shades deeper than the sky. We had no light except the 'Cross,' and a swarm of other stars; it was a rare night, dark crystal.

"There had been a dance, and the girls had gone to bed; all the shutters were closed, the old house against our backs looked very silent, and flat, and long. Only the door was open, and we sat round it. The sparks from our pipes writhed about in the air, or, falling on to the *stoep* expired like the words dropping from our mouths. You know the kind of talk. In the morning we had played cricket amongst the trees—a hit into the vineyards, 'five and out'—girls and all. In the afternoon we had played tennis, on a half-made court—the girls too. In the evening we had danced. Some had hitched up, and departed.

Some had gone to bed. We four were left, and old Juno, the pointer, with her head on her paws, and her nose wrinkling at the squeaking of some tiny beast in the darkness. Little Byng, with his waistcoat unbuttoned, was sitting quite square above his parted legs; round-faced little man, no neck to speak of, straw-coloured hair, and eyes without lashes, just like a dissipated egg. You know him, Billy Byng, best-hearted little man, they say, in Cape Colony. Young Sanley—married to one of the Detwell girls, sleeping a healthy sleep already indoors—such a neat, smooth chap; great Scott! yes, and how commonplace! with his pale moustache, and his high white forehead, and his slim nose, and his well-cut clothes, and his tidy made-up tie. And our host—you know him; a little too alert, a little too dark, a little too everything, but a right good fellow; engaged to the other Detwell girl, who was perhaps thinking of him, and perhaps wasn't, in her bed just over our heads. Well, we were talking; profaning things a bit; not much, you know, couldn't lay claim to original profanity; just tarbrushing the surface. We were all a bit bored, rather sleepy, and accordingly, just a little too jovial. Even Juno, who's at least as wise as any human, was pondering somewhat gloomily over her master's intention of taking us to shoot pheasants at daybreak

—'before it was too hot.' We had been there before; we knew it—that pheasant shooting, up stony slopes in a tangle of cover, with the chance of a couple of shots, at most, producing one disembowelled bird. Every now and then one of us would get up, walk to the edge of the *stoep*, stare into the dark vineyard, stretch as if he were going to make a move, and after all yield to our host's: 'Just one more, boys!'

"All of a sudden young Sanley murmured:

"'I heard footsteps.'

"'Some nigger,' said our host.

"And then at the far end of the *stoep* a woman appeared, walked straight into our midst, and sat down. It was pretty startling, and absurd. Little Byng seemed absolutely transfixed, he blinked his lashless eyes, and seemed to twitch all over his face. Sanley got very pale and nervously tapped the table. Our host alone kept the use of his tongue.

"'Corrie!' he said.

"'Why not? Give me a drink, Jack Allen.'

"Our host in a kind of surreptitious way, poured brandy into a glass and added seltzer.

"The woman held out her hand for it, and as she tilted her chin to drink, the cloak fell from her shoulders, and we could see her neck and arms gleaming, out of her evening dress.

"'Thanks!' she said; 'I wanted that.' Then she bent over the table and leaned her face on her hand. Well, no one spoke, and we all cast secret looks back at the house. Sanley reached out his hand quietly and drew the door to.

"The woman said:

"'I saw the bowls of your pipes, and heard your voices. You're not too lively now.'

"Her voice wasn't loud; but it sounded wilfully coarsened. Her lips were slightly parted above her forefinger crooked across her chin. Her nostrils seemed to broaden as she looked at us, in a sort of distrustful way. She wore no hat, and her hair was like a little black patch of the night over her brow. Her eyes; how can I describe them? They seemed to see everything, and to see nothing. They were so intent, and mournful, and defiant; hard, if you like, tragic, too. I remembered, now, where I had met her—though I hadn't been ten days in the Colony—at the supper party of a man called Brown, after the theatre; very vulgar and noisy.

"The most notorious woman in Cape Town! Her house had been pointed out to me, too, just at the corner of the Malay quarter; a little house, painted mauve, with large, red flowers starring its front.

"The most notorious woman in Cape Town!

I looked at our host. He was biting his fingers. At Byng. His mouth was a little open, as if he were about to make a very sage remark. Sanley struck me as looking altogether too pitiably decent.

"Our host broke the silence.

"'How? Where? Eh! What?'

"'Staying down there at Charlie Lennard's; what a beast! Oh! what a beast!'

"Her eyes rested, wistfully it seemed to me, on each of us in turn.

"'It's a beautiful night, isn't it?' she said.

"Little Byng kicked out his foot, as if he would have sent something sprawling, and began stuttering out:

"'I beg pardon—I beg pardon.' I saw the old pointer thrust her nose against the woman's knees. Something moved, back in the house; we all looked round with a start. Then the woman began to laugh, almost noiselessly, as though she had an unholy understanding of our minds, as if she would never leave off. I saw Sanley tear at his hair, and stealthily smooth it down again. Our host frowned horribly, and thrust his hands so deep into his pockets, that it seemed to me they must go through the linings. Little Byng almost bounded up and down in his chair. Then just as suddenly, the woman stopped laughing; there

was dead silence. You could only hear the squeaking of the tiny beast. At last the woman said:

"'Doesn't it smell good to-night; it's quiet, too. . . . Here! let me have another drink!' She took the glass our host held out: 'Your very good health,' she said, 'my respectable friends!'

"Our host suddenly resumed his seat, crossed his arms, and sighed. A pitiful little noise he made of it.

"'I'm not going to hurt you,' she said, 'I wouldn't hurt a fly to-night— It smells like home. Look!' She held out the edge of her skirts to us. 'Dew! I'm dripping; isn't it sweet?'

"Her voice had lost all coarseness—it might have been your mother or sister speaking; it was ever so queer, and little Byng sputtered out: 'Too bad! too bad!' but whether to her, or of her, or to us—no one knew.

"'I've walked miles to-night,' she said. 'Haven't had such a walk since I was a girl.' There was a kind of tone in her voice that hurt me horribly; and suddenly young Sanley rose.

"'Excuse me, Allen!' he stammered: 'it's very late. Going to turn in?' I caught the gleam of his eyes on the woman.

"'Oh! are you going?' she said. There was a sort of regret, a sort of something innocent and unconscious in her voice, that seemed regularly

to pierce a bag of venom in that smooth young man.

"'Madam, I am. My wife——' He stopped, groped for the door, pulled it open, smiled his mean tidy smile, and vanished.

"The woman had risen, and she gave a sort of laugh.

"'*His wife!* Oh! Well, I wish her happiness. Ah! my God! I *do* wish her happiness—I *do;* and yours Jack Allen; and yours, if you have one. Billy Byng, you remember me—you remember when I first—to-night, I thought—I thought——' She hid her face. One by one we slunk off the *stoep,* and left her, sobbing her heart out before the house.

"God knows what she was thinking of! God knows what sort of things lurk round us, and leap out—thank Heaven! not often—from the darkness, as that did!

"I crept back later to the edge of the vineyard.

"There she was still, and, beside her, little Byng, with his toes turned out, bending over her fingers. Then I saw him draw them under his arm; pat them with his other hand and gazing up at the sky, lead her gently out into the darkness." . . .

1900.

XII

THE CONSUMMATION

BOUT 1889 there lived in London a man named Harrison, of an amiable and perverse disposition. One morning, at Charing Cross Station, a lady in whom he was interested said to him:

"But Mr. Harrison, why don't you *write?* You are just the person!"

Harrison saw that he was, and at the end of two years had produced eleven short stories, with two of which he was not particularly pleased, but as he naturally did not like to waste them, he put them with the others and sent them all to a publisher. In the course of time he received from the publisher a letter saying that for a certain consideration or commission he would be prepared to undertake the risk of publishing these stories upon Harrison's incurring all the expenses. This pleased Harrison, who, feeling that no time should be wasted in making his "work" public, wrote desiring the publisher to put the matter in hand.

The publisher replied to this with an estimate and an agreement, to which Harrison responded with a cheque. The publisher answered at once with a polite letter, suggesting that for Harrison's advantage a certain additional sum should be spent on advertisements. Harrison saw the point of this directly, and replied with another cheque —knowing that between gentlemen there could be no question of money.

In due time the book appeared. It was called "In the Track of the Stars," by Cuthbert Harrison; and within a fortnight Harrison began to receive reviews. He read them with an extraordinary pleasure, for they were full of discriminating flattery. One asked if he were a "Lancelot in disguise." Two Liberal papers described the stories as masterpieces; one compared them to the best things in Poe and de Maupassant; and another called him a second Rudyard Kipling. He was greatly encouraged, but, being by nature modest, he merely wrote to the publisher inquiring what he thought of a second edition. His publisher replied with an estimate, mentioning casually that he had already sold about four hundred copies. Harrison referred to his cheque book and saw that the first edition had been a thousand copies. He replied, therefore, that he would wait. He waited, and at the end of six months wrote again.

The publisher replied that he had now sold four hundred and three copies, but that, as Mr. Harrison had at present an unknown name, he did not advise a second edition: there was no market for short stories. These had, however, been so well received that he recommended Mr. Harrison to write a long story. The book was without doubt a success, so far as a book of short stories could ever be a success. . . . He sent Harrison a small cheque, and a large number of reviews which Harrison had already received.

Harrison decided not to have a second edition, but to rest upon his *succès d'estime*. All his relations were extremely pleased, and almost immediately he started writing his long story. Now it happened that among Harrison's friends was a man of genius, who sent Harrison a letter.

"I had no idea," he said, "that you could write like this; of course, my dear fellow, the stories are not 'done'; there is no doubt about it, they are *not* 'done.' But you have plenty of time; you are young, and I see that you can do things. Come down here and let us have a talk about what you are at now."

On receiving this Harrison wasted no time, but went down. The man of genius, over a jug of claret-cup, on a summer's afternoon, pointed out how the stories were not "done."

"They show a feeling for outside drama," said he, "but there is none of the real drama of psychology."

Harrison showed him his reviews. He left the man of genius on the following day with a certain sensation of soreness. In the course of a few weeks, however, the soreness wore off, and the words of the man of genius began to bear fruit, and at the end of two months Harrison wrote:

"You are quite right—the stories were not 'done.' I think, however, that I am now on the right path."

At the end of another year, after submitting it once or twice to the man of genius, he finished his second book, and called it "John Endacott." About this time he left off alluding to his "work" and began to call his writings "stuff."

He sent it to the publisher with the request that he would consider its publication on a royalty. In rather more than the ordinary course of time the publisher replied, that in his opinion (a lay one) "John Endacott" didn't quite fulfil the remarkable promise of Mr. Harrison's first book; and, to show Harrison his perfect honesty, he enclosed an extract from the "reader's" opinion, which stated that Mr. Harrison had "fallen between the stools of art and the British public." Much against the publisher's personal feelings,

therefore, the publisher considered that he could only undertake the risk in the then bad condition of trade—if Mr. Harrison would guarantee the expenses.

Harrison hardened his heart, and replied that he was not prepared to guarantee the expenses. Upon which the publisher returned his manuscript, saying that in his opinion (a lay one) Mr. Harrison was taking the wrong turning, which he (the publisher) greatly regretted, for he had much appreciated the pleasant relations which had always existed between them.

Harrison sent the book to a younger publisher who accepted it on a postponed royalty. It appeared.

At the end of three weeks Harrison began to receive reviews. They were mixed. One complained that there was not enough plot; another, fortunately by the same post, that there was too much plot. The general tendency was to regret that the author of "In the Track of the Stars" had not fulfilled the hopes raised by his first book, in which he had shown such promise of completely hitting the public taste. This might have depressed Harrison had he not received a letter from the man of genius couched in these terms:

"My dear fellow, I am more pleased than I can

say. I am now more than ever convinced that you can do things."

Harrison at once began a third book.

Owing to the unfortunate postponement of his royalty he did not receive anything from his second book. The publisher sold three hundred copies. During the period (eighteen months) that he was writing his third book the man of genius introduced Harrison to a critic, with the words: "You may rely on his judgment; the beggar is infallible."

While to the critic he said: "I tell you, this fellow can do things."

The critic was good to Harrison, who, as before said, was of an amiable disposition.

When he had finished his third book he dedicated it to the man of genius and called it "Summer."

"My dear fellow," wrote the man of genius, when he received his copy, "it is *good!* There is no more to be said about it; it *is* good! I read it with indescribable pleasure."

On the same day Harrison received a letter from the critic which contained the following: "Yes, it's undoubtedly an advance. It's not quite Art, but it's a great advance!"

Harrison was considerably encouraged. The same publisher brought out the book, and sold

quite two hundred copies; but he wrote rather dolefully to Harrison, saying that the public demand seemed "almost exhausted." Recognising the fact that comparisons are odious, Harrison refrained from comparing the sale of the book with that of "In the Track of the Stars," in which he had shown such promise of "completely hitting the public taste." Indeed, about this time he began to have dreams of abandoning the sources of his private income and living the true literary life. He had not many reviews, and began his fourth book.

He was two years writing this "work," which he called "A Lost Man" and dedicated to the critic. He sent a presentation copy to the man of genius, from whom he received an almost immediate reply:

"My dear fellow, it is amazing, really amazing how you progress! Who would ever imagine you were the same man that wrote 'In the Track of the Stars'; yet I pique myself on the fact that even in your first book I spotted that you could do things. Ah!—I wish I could write like you! 'A Lost Man' is wonderfully good."

The man of genius was quite sincere in these remarks, which he wrote after perusing the first six chapters. He never, indeed, actually finished reading the book—he felt so tired, as if Harrison

had exhausted him—but he always alluded to it as "wonderfully good," just as if he really had finished it.

Harrison sent another copy to the critic, who wrote a genuinely warm letter, saying that he, Harrison, had "achieved" it at last. "This," he said, "is *art*. I doubt if you will ever do anything better than this. . . . I crown you."

Harrison at once commenced his fifth book.

He was more than three years upon this new "work," and called it "A Pilgrimage." There was a good deal of difficulty in getting it published. Two days after it appeared, however, the critic wrote to Harrison: "I cannot tell you," he said, "how very good I think your new book. It is perhaps stronger than 'A Lost Man,' perhaps more original. If anything it is too—I have not finished it yet, but I've written off at once to let you know."

As a matter of fact, he never finished the book. He could not—it was too——! "It's wonderfully good," he said, however, to his wife, and he made *her* read it.

Meanwhile, the man of genius wired saying: "Am going to write to you about your book. Positively am, but have lumbago and cannot hold pen."

Harrison never received any letter, but the

critic received one saying: "Can you read it? *I* can't. Altogether over 'done.'"

Harrison was elated. His new publisher was not. He wrote in a peevish strain, saying there was *absolutely no sale.* Mr. Harrison must take care what he was doing or he would exhaust his public, and enclosing a solitary review, which said amongst other things: "This book may be very fine art, too fine altogether. *We* found it dull."

Harrison went abroad, and began his sixth book. He named it "The Consummation," and worked at it in hermit-like solitude; in it, for the first time, he satisfied himself. He wrote it, as it were, with his heart's blood, with an almost bitter delight. And he often smiled to himself as he thought how with his first book he had so nearly hit the public taste; and how of his fourth the critic had said: "This is *art.* I doubt if you will ever do anything better than this." How far away they seemed! Ah! *this* book was indeed the "consummation" devoutly to be wished.

In the course of time he returned to England and took a cottage at Hampstead, and there he finished the book. The day after it was finished he took the manuscript and, going to a secluded spot on the top of the Heath, lay down on the grass to read it quietly through. He read three chapters,

and, putting the remainder down, sat with his head buried in his hands.

"Yes," he thought, "I *have* done it at last. *It is good*, wonderfully good!" and for two hours he sat like that, with his head in his hands. He had indeed exhausted his public. It was *too* good—*he could not read it himself!*

Returning to his cottage, he placed the manuscript in a drawer. He never wrote another word.

1904.

XIII

THE CHOICE

SOME years ago in Chelsea there used to stand at the crossing of a street leading to the Embankment an old man whose living was derived from the cleanliness of boots. In the intervals of plying his broom he could generally be seen seated on an upturned wooden box, talking to an Irish terrier, who belonged to a house near by, and had taken a fancy to him. He was a Cornishman by birth, had been a plumber by trade, and was a cheerful, independent old fellow with ruddy cheeks, grey hair and beard, and little, bright, rather watery, grey eyes. But he was a great sufferer from a variety of ailments. He had gout, and some trouble in his side, and feet that were like barometers in their susceptibility to weather. Of all these matters he would speak to us in a very impersonal and uncomplaining way, diagnosing himself, as it were, for the benefit of his listeners. He was, it seems, alone in the world, not having of course at that time anything to look forward to in the way of a pension,

nor, one fancies, very much to look back on except the death of his near relatives and the decline of the plumbing trade. It had declined him for years, but, even before a long illness ousted him in favour of younger men, he had felt very severely the palpable difference in things. In old days plumbing had been a quiet, steady business, in which you were apparently "on your own, and knew where you were"; but latterly "you had just had to do what the builders told you, and of course they weren't going to make allowances; if you couldn't do the job as fast as a young man—out you went, and there you were." This long illness and the death of his wife coming close together (and sweeping away the last of his savings), had determined him therefore to buy a broom and seek for other occupation. To sweep a crossing was not a profession that he himself would have chosen before all others, still it was "better than the 'house—and you were your own master." The climate in those days not being the most suitable for a business which necessitated constant exposure to all elements but that of fire, his ailments were proportionally active; but the one remarkable feature of his perpetual illness was that he was always "better" than he had been. We could not at times help thinking that this continual crescendo of good health should

have gradually raised him to a pinnacle of paramount robustness; and it was with a certain disappointment, in the face of his assurances, that we watched him getting, on the contrary, slowly stiffer and feebler, and noted the sure increase of the egg-like deposits, which he would proudly have us remark, about his wrists and fingers.

He was so entirely fixed and certain that he was "going in the river" before he went "in the 'house," that one hesitated to suggest that the time was at hand when he should cease to expose himself all day and every day. He had evidently pondered long and with a certain deep philosophy on this particular subject, and fortified himself by hearsay.

"The 'house ain't for a man that respects himself," he would remark. And, since that was his conviction, such as respected themselves could not very well beg him to act against it. At the same time, it became increasingly difficult to pass him without wondering how much longer it would be before he finally sought shelter in the element of water, which was so apt to pour down on him day by day.

It is uncertain whether he discussed this matter of the river *versus* the 'house with the dog, to whom he was always talking; but that they shared a certain fellow feeling on the subject of

exposure and advancing age is more than probable; for as he would point out: The poor old feller's teeth were going; and the stiffness across his loins was always worse when it was wet. In fact, he was afraid that the old dog was gettin' old! And the dog would sit patiently for an hour at a time looking up at him, trying to find out, perhaps, from his friend's face what a dog should do, when the enemy weighed on him till he could no longer tolerate himself, not knowing, of course, that kindly humans would see to it that he did not suffer more than a dog could bear. On his face with its grizzled muzzle and rheumy eyes, thus turned up, there was never a sign of debate, it was full of confidence that, whatever decision his friend came to, in this momentous question between the river and the 'house, would be all right, perfectly satisfactory in every way to dogs and men.

One very rainy summer, our old friend in a burst of confidence disclosed the wish of his heart. It was that he might be suffered to go down once more to Fowey in Cornwall, where he had been born, but had not been for fifty years. By some means or other the money was procured for this enterprise, and he was enabled to set off by excursion train for a fortnight's holiday. He was observed the day before his start talking at great

length to the dog, and feeding it out of a paper bag with carraway-seed biscuits. A letter was received from him during his absence, observing certain strange laws of caligraphy, and beginning "Honnoured Sir and Lady." It was full of an almost passionate description of a regatta, of a certain "Joe Petherick" who had remembered him, of the "luvly weather" and other sources of his great happiness; and ended "Yours truley obedient." On the fifteenth day he was back at his corner seated on his box in the pouring rain, saying that he was "a different man, ten years younger, and ready to 'go' now, any day"; nor could anything dissuade him from the theory that Heaven had made a special lodgment in our persons on his behalf. But only four days later, the sun being for once in the heavens, he was so long in answering a salutation that we feared he had been visited by some kind of stroke; his old face had lost colour, it seemed stiff, and his eyes had almost disappeared.

Inquiry elicited from him the information that he was better than he had been, but that the dog was dead. They had put it away while he had been gone, and he was afraid that he should miss the "faithful old feller."

"He was very good to me," he said; "always came for a bit of bread or biscuit. And he was

company to me; I never knew such a sensible creature." He seemed to think that the dog must have pined during his absence, and that this had accelerated his end by making his owners think he was more decrepit than he really was.

The death of the dog, and the cold damp autumn that year, told heavily on the old man, but it was not till mid-November that he was noted one morning absent from his post. As he did not reappear his lodging was sought out. It was in a humble street, but the house was neat and clean, and the landlady seemed a good, rough woman. She informed us that our old friend was laid up "with pleurisy and the gouty rheumatics"; that by rights, of course, he ought to be in the infirmary, but she didn't like to turn him out, though where she would get her rent from she didn't know, to say nothing of his food, because she couldn't let him starve while there he was cryin' out with the pain, and no one but herself to turn a hand to him, with his door open at the top of the house, where he could holler for her if he wanted. An awful independent old feller, too, or else she wouldn't hesitate, for that was where he ought to be, and no mistake, not having a soul in the world to close his eyes, and that's what it would come to, though she would never be sur-

prised if he got up and went out to-morrow, he was that stubborn!

Leaving her to the avocations which we had interrupted by coming in, we went upstairs.

The door of the back room at the top was, as indeed she had led us to suppose, open; and through it the sound of our old friend's voice could be heard, travelling forth:

"O Lord God, that took the dog from me, and gave me this here rheumatics, help me to keep a stiff and contrite heart. I am an old man, O Lord God, and I am not one to go into that *place*. So God give me a stiff heart, and I will remember you in my prayers, for that's about all I can do now, O God. I have been a good one in my time, O Lord, and cannot remember doing harm to any man for a long while now, and I have tried to keep upsides with it; so, good Lord, remember and do not forget me, now that I am down, a-lying here all day, and the rent goin' on. For ever and ever, O Lord, Amen."

We allowed a little time to pass before we went in, unwilling that he should think we had overheard that prayer. He was lying in a small dingy bed, with a medicine bottle and glass beside him on an old tin trunk. There was no fire.

He was—it seemed—better than he had been; the doctor's stuff was doing him good.

Certain arrangements were made for his benefit, and in less than three weeks he was back again at his corner.

In the spring of the following year we went abroad and were absent several months. He was no longer at his post when at last we came back, and a policeman informed us that he had not been there for some weeks. We made a second pilgrimage to his lodgings. The house had changed hands. The new landlady was a thin, anxious-looking young woman, who spoke in a thin, anxious voice. Yes, the old man had been taken very ill—double pneumonia and heart disease, she thought. Anyway, she couldn't have the worry and responsibility of him, let alone her rent. She had had the doctor, and had him taken off. Yes, it had upset him a bit; he would never have gone if he'd had his choice; but of course she had her living to get. She had his bits of things locked up all right; he owed her a little rent. In her opinion he'd never come out again. She was very sorry for him, too, he'd given no trouble till he was took ill.

Following up her information we repaired with heavy hearts to the 'house, which he had so often declared he would never enter. Having ascertained the number of his ward we mounted the beautifully clean stairs. In the

fifth of a row of beds, our old friend was lying, apparently asleep. But watching him carefully, we saw that his lips, deep sunk between his frosty moustache and beard, were continually moving.

"He's not asleep," said the nurse; "he'll lie like that all the time. He frets."

At the sound of his name, he had opened his eyes, which, though paler and smaller and more rheumy, were still almost bright. He fixed them on us with a peculiar stare, as much as to say: "You've taken an advantage of me, finding me here." We could hardly bear that look, and hurriedly asked him how he was. He tried to raise himself and answered huskily that he was better than he had been. We begged him not to exert himself, and told him how it was that we had been away, and so forth. He seemed to pay no attention, but suddenly said: "I'm in here; I don't mean to stay, I'll be goin' out in a day or two." We tried to confirm that theory, but the expression of his eyes seemed to take away our power of comfort, and make us ashamed of looking at him. He beckoned us closer.

"If I'd a had the use of my legs," he whispered, "they'd never have had me. I'd a-gone in the river first. But I don't mean to stay—I'm goin' back home."

The nurse told us, however, that this was out of the question; he was still very ill.

Four days later we went again to see him. He was no longer there. He had gone home. They had buried him that morning.

1910.

XIV

THE JAPANESE QUINCE

AS Mr. Nilson, well known in the City, opened the window of his dressing-room on Campden Hill, he experienced a peculiar sweetish sensation in the back of his throat, and a feeling of emptiness just under his fifth rib. Hooking the window back, he noticed that a little tree in the Square Gardens had come out in blossom, and that the thermometer stood at sixty. 'Perfect morning,' he thought; 'Spring at last!'

Resuming some meditations on the price of Tintos, he took up an ivory-backed hand-glass and scrutinised his face. His firm, well-coloured cheeks, with their neat brown moustaches, and his round, well-opened, clear grey eyes, wore a reassuring appearance of good health. Putting on his black frock coat, he went downstairs.

In the dining-room his morning paper was laid out on the sideboard. Mr. Nilson had scarcely taken it in his hand when he again became aware of that queer feeling. Somewhat concerned, he

went to the French window and descended the scrolled iron steps into the fresh air. A cuckoo clock struck eight.

'Half an hour to breakfast,' he thought; 'I'll take a turn in the Gardens.'

He had them to himself, and proceeded to pace the circular path with his morning paper clasped behind him. He had scarcely made two revolutions, however, when it was borne in on him that, instead of going away in the fresh air, the feeling had increased. He drew several deep breaths, having heard deep breathing recommended by his wife's doctor; but they augmented rather than diminished the sensation—as of some sweetish liquor in course within him, together with a faint aching just above his heart. Running over what he had eaten the night before, he could recollect no unusual dish, and it occurred to him that it might possibly be some smell affecting him. But he could detect nothing except a faint sweet lemony scent, rather agreeable than otherwise, which evidently emanated from the bushes budding in the sunshine. He was on the point of resuming his promenade, when a blackbird close by burst into song, and, looking up, Mr. Nilson saw at a distance of perhaps five yards a little tree, in the heart of whose branches the bird was perched. He stood staring curiously at this tree.

recognising it for that which he had noticed from his window. It was covered with young blossoms, pink and white, and little bright green leaves both round and spikey; and on all this blossom and these leaves the sunlight glistened. Mr. Nilson smiled; the little tree was so alive and pretty! And instead of passing on, he stayed there smiling at the tree.

'Morning like this!' he thought; 'and here I am the only person in the Square who has the—to come out and——!' But he had no sooner conceived this thought, than he saw quite near him a man with his hands behind him, who was also staring up and smiling at the little tree. Rather taken aback, Mr. Nilson ceased to smile, and looked furtively at the stranger. It was his next-door neighbour, Mr. Tandram, well known in the City, who had occupied the adjoining house for some five years. Mr. Nilson perceived at once the awkwardness of his position, for, being married, they had not yet had occasion to speak to one another. Doubtful as to his proper conduct he decided at last to murmur: "Fine morning!" and was passing on, when Mr. Tandram answered: "Beautiful, for the time of year!" Detecting a slight nervousness in his neighbour's voice, Mr. Nilson was emboldened to regard him openly. He was of about Mr. Nilson's own height, with

firm, well-coloured cheeks, neat brown moustaches, and round, well-opened, clear grey eyes; and he was wearing a black frock coat. Mr. Nilson noticed that he had his morning paper clasped behind him as he looked up at the little tree. And, visited somehow by the feeling that he had been caught out, he said abruptly:

"Er—can you give me the name of that tree?"

Mr. Tandram answered:

"I was about to ask you that," and stepped towards it. Mr. Nilson also approached the tree.

"Sure to have its name on, I should think," he said.

Mr. Tandram was the first to see the little label, close to where the blackbird had been sitting. He read it out.

"Japanese quince!"

"Ah!" said Mr. Nilson, "thought so. Early flowerers."

"Very," assented Mr. Tandram, and added: "Quite a feelin' in the air to-day."

Mr. Nilson nodded.

"It was a blackbird singin'," he said.

"Blackbirds," answered Mr. Tandram, "I prefer them to thrushes myself; more body in the note." And he looked at Mr. Nilson in an almost friendly way.

"Quite," murmured Mr. Nilson. "These ex-

otics, they don't bear fruit. Pretty blossom!" and he again glanced up at the blossom, thinking: 'Nice fellow, this, I rather like him.'

Mr. Tandram also gazed up at the blossom. And the little tree, as if appreciating their attention, quivered and glowed. From a distance, the blackbird gave a loud, clear call. Mr. Nilson dropped his eyes. It struck him suddenly that Mr. Tandram looked a little foolish; and, as if he had seen himself, he said: "I must be going in. Good morning!"

A shade passed over Mr. Tandram's face, as if he, too, had suddenly noticed something about Mr. Nilson.

"Good morning," he replied, and clasping their journals to their backs they separated.

Mr. Nilson retraced his steps towards his garden window, walking slowly so as to avoid arriving at the same time as his neighbour. Having seen Mr. Tandram mount his scrolled iron steps, he ascended his own in turn. On the top step he paused.

With the slanting Spring sunlight darting and quivering into it, the Japanese quince seemed more living than a tree. The blackbird had returned to it, and was chanting out his heart.

Mr. Nilson sighed; again he felt that queer sensation, that chokey feeling in his throat.

The sound of a cough or sigh attracted his attention. There, in the shadow of his French window, stood Mr. Tandram, also looking forth across the Gardens at the little quince tree.

Unaccountably upset, Mr. Nilson turned abruptly into the house, and opened his morning paper.

1910.

XV

ONCE MORE

AWAKENED by the tiny kicks of her baby, she straightened his limbs on her breast, and lay staring up at the dirty ceiling. The first light of the March morning, through a window which had but a ragged piece of muslin over the lower half, spread its pale glimmer in the little room. It was, like all the little back rooms of that street, deserted by Hope; neither was there anything in it of beauty or of value except the remains of her stock of violets in the round brown-wicker basket.

Soothed by the warmth of her chest and arms the baby was sleeping again, with his down-covered tiny head snuggled into the hollow of her neck; and, just above that head, the mother's face was like that of a little sphynx.

Two days before, her husband had left her, saying that he was not coming back, but this had not dismayed her, for with the strange wisdom of those who begin to suffer young, she had long ago measured her chances with and without him. She

made more than he did in their profession of flower-selling, because sometimes a "toff" gave her a fancy price, touched perhaps by the sight of her tired, pretty face, and young figure bent sideways by the weight of her baby. Yes, he took more money off her than she did off him; besides, he had left her twice before in the same way, and twice come back. The feeling in her heart was due to another discovery. Last evening, going home dead-tired, she had seen him on an omnibus with his arm round a woman's waist. At that sight a flame had leaped up in her; burdened with baby and basket, she had run after the 'bus; but it went too fast for her, she was soon left behind. And long, huddled over her fire, she had sat, seeing him with that other woman. And when the fire went out, getting into bed, had lain sleepless, still seeing, and hearing, and shivering with the cold. So, that was where he went! Was she going to put up with it any more? Thus she lay brooding, avoiding all extravagance, matter-of-fact, sphynx-like, even in thought.

The room grew light; she got up, went to the little cracked mirror, and looked long at her face. If she had ever known that she was pretty, the life she led with her boy-husband, sometimes ill-treated, always scantily clothed, and more or less in want, had bereft her of this knowledge. The

woman round whose waist she had seen his arm looked well-fed and had feathers in her hat. And in that mirror she tried desperately to find something which might weigh against those full cheeks and those feathers. But she seemed to herself all eyes, there was no colour in her cheeks; she seemed sad to herself. Turning from that glass of little comfort, she lit the fire, and taking up her baby, sat down to feed it. With her bare feet to the flame, and feeling the movement of the baby's lips against her, she had the first sensation of warmth since the omnibus had passed her. To her, striving so hard but so unconsciously for any thought that would assuage her jealousy, there came a recollection that was almost pleasant. Last evening a "toff," entering his garden gate, had bought from her a single bunch of violets for half-a-crown. Why had he smiled, and given her that half-crown? With each tug of the baby's lips, the sensation of warmth grew, and with it began to be mingled a feeling of excitement. He would not have looked at her so long, would not have smiled—unless he had thought her pretty! But suddenly the baby's lips ceased to move; the feeling of excitement died. Wrapping the little thing in her shawl, she laid him back on the bed; then, heating a little water, began to wash with unwonted care. She had a passionate desire to make

herself finer than that woman with feathers in her hat. No "toff" would have smiled at *her*, even though she had not had to pawn her clothes. Her little brain, frozen with brooding, flaming with jealousy, ran riot amongst clothes. There hung on two nails driven into the wall—all her wardrobe —a ragged skirt, torn jersey, and black straw hat. She put on her one undergarment, and went up to them. Looking at those dim clothes, she was vaguely conscious of the irony in things. Three weeks ago she had "put away" her best suit for four shillings and sixpence, to renew her husband's stock of flowers, which rain had ruined. She had pawned her attractions to give him the chance to go after that woman! From the secret place where she kept her wealth, from those many pawn-tickets, she selected one, and put it between her teeth; then, from a broken cup, where, under a ragged cloth, she stored her money, she took the "toff's" half-crown, and five pennies. It was all she had, and the week's rent was owing. She looked round the room; her blankets were in pawn; there was nothing left except her shawl. It was a thick shawl, good for eighteen-pence. With interest threepence, she would still need fourpence to redeem her suit. She went to her flower-basket and lifted the piece of dirty sacking. The bunches were withered. In her rage and disturb-

ance overnight she had forgotten to damp them. She sat down on her bed, and for full quarter of an hour stayed there unmoving, more like a little sphynx than ever, with her short, ivory-coloured face, black eyes, straight brows and closed red lips. Suddenly she got up; took off her undergarment and examined it. There were no holes! Wrapping it tightly in her shawl, she put on skirt and jersey, pinned her hat to her black hair, took pawn-ticket and her money, and went down the dirty stairs, out into the cold.

She made her way to the small shop which was the centre of her universe. No one was there, for the door had only just been opened; and she waited, stolid, amongst those innumerable goods, each one of which had been brought there wrapped in the stuff of human life. The proprietor caught sight of her presently through the glass of the inner door. He was a dark, strong man, and his quick eye, which had in it a sort of cringing hardness, instantly marked her shawl.

"I've had that before, I think, eighteen-pence, ain't it?" From its recesses he took the undergarment. He looked at this critically; it was very plain, thick, and had no frills, but it was strangely new. "Sixpence on that, 'alfpenny off for the washing." Then, as if something in the nature of this transaction had moved him, he

added: "Let you off the washing." She silently held out to him her small rough hand, with her money and the pawn-ticket. He scrutinised both, and said: "I see; that'll be tuppence I owe you on the deal."

With the twopence and her suit, she journeyed home. She put on the suit over her skirt and jersey, for the sake of the warmth, and because that woman had full cheeks; stood for some minutes smoothing her hair and rubbing her face, goose-fleshed with the cold; then, leaving her baby with the woman on the ground floor, she went out towards the road where the omnibus had passed. Her heart was dry with longing to meet that woman; to be avenged on her, and *him*. All the morning she walked up and down. Now and again a youth stopped her, and tried to enter into conversation; but he soon desisted, as if something in her face had withered his good intentions. With the twopence she bought a sausage-roll, ate it, went home, fed her baby, and again came out. It was now afternoon, but she still wandered up and down, always driven on by that longing; and every now and then smiling up at some man. What she thought to gain by these smiles cannot be told, for no one could have answered them, so mirthless were they; and yet they gave her a queer dead pleasure, as if she felt

that they ministered to her vengeance. A strong wind drove the clouds over a clear blue sky, and in this wind the buds and few crocuses in the gardens were trembling. In some of the Squares, too, pigeons were cooing; and all the people seemed hurrying with happiness. But for that young wife, for ever walking and loitering down the long road where the omnibus had passed, Spring travelled the air in vain.

At five o'clock, moved by yet another obscure impulse of her longing for revenge, she branched off her beat to the white house where she had seen the "toff" enter last evening. She hesitated long before ringing the bell, and then very stolidly asked to see "the gentleman," in a voice a little thick and hoarse from the many colds she caught selling her flowers. While the maid went to see if this were possible, she waited in the hall. There was a mirror there; but she did not look at herself, standing quite still with her eyes fixed on the ground.

She was shown into a room, lighter, warmer, more strange than any room she had ever been in; giving her a feeling as though a plateful of Christmas pudding, soft, dark, and rich, had been placed before her. The walls were white and the woodwork white, and there were brown velvet curtains, and gold frames round the pictures.

She went in smiling, as at the men in the street. But the smile faded from her lips at once. On a sofa was a lady in a white dress; and she wished to turn and go away, for she felt at once that they must know she had no undergarment beneath her new suit. The gentleman asked her to sit down. She sat down, therefore; and in answer to questions, told them that her stock was spoiled, that she owed a week's rent, that her husband had left her and the baby! But even while speaking, she felt that this was not what she had come to say. They seemed to ask the questions over and over again, as if they did not understand her. And she told them suddenly that her husband had gone with another woman. When she said that, the lady made soft sounds, as if she understood and was sorry. She noticed what pretty small ears the lady had. The gentleman was afraid he did not know what could be done for her: Did she wish to leave her husband? She answered quickly: "I couldn't stay with him now, of course." And the lady murmured: "No, no; of course not." What then—the gentleman said—did she propose to do? She remained silent, staring at the carpet. It seemed to her suddenly that they were thinking: 'She's come for money.' The gentleman took out a sovereign, and said: "Will that be any good to you?" She made a little bob,

and took the sovereign, clutching it very tight. It seemed to her that they wanted her to go away. She got up, therefore, and went to the door. The gentleman went with her; and as he opened the front door he smiled. She did not smile back, for she saw that he had only meant to be kind, yesterday. And this hurt her, as if suddenly there had slipped away from her part of her revenge.

She went home, still clutching the unchanged sovereign; so weak and faint that she could hardly feed her baby. She made up her fire and sat down beside it. It was past six, and nearly dark. Twice before, he had come back on the third day, about this time. If he were to come back now!

She crouched nearer to the fire. It grew quite dark. She looked at her baby; he was asleep, with his tiny fists crumpled against his cheeks. She made up the fire, and went back to her beat along the road where the omnibus had passed.

Two or three men stopped her, but she no longer smiled at them, and they soon sheered off. It was very clear, very cold; but she did not feel the cold. Her eyes were fastened on those great vans of warmth, the motor omnibuses. Long before each had borne its burden close, her eyes had begun searching. Long after they had rumbled

by, her gaze followed them from under the brim of her black straw hat. But that for which she was looking never appeared. In the midst of the roar and the sudden hushes, of the stir and confusion of lamplight and shadow, the stir and confusion and blackness in her own heart, she thought of her baby, and hurried away. He was still sleeping, the fire still alight. Without undressing, she crept into bed, exhausted. If she was like a little sphynx awake, she was more so than ever under the mystery of sleep, with her black lashes resting on her cheeks, and her lips just parted. In her dreams she twisted her hands and moaned. She woke at midnight.

By the light of the still live fire she saw her husband moving past the foot of the bed. He neither spoke, nor looked at her, but sat down before the fire, and began to take off his boots. The sight of that domestic act roused her to fury. So he could come in when he liked—after going where he had gone, after being what he had been, the——! But no fierce sound came; she could form no word bad enough to call him by. After three days—after what she had seen—after all her waiting—and walking—and suffering—taking off his boots! Stealthily she raised herself in bed, the better to watch that act. If she had opened her mouth it would have been to utter a scream; no lesser cry

could have relieved her heart. And still he neither spoke nor looked at her. She saw him slide down off the wooden chair, as if he would creep right into the fire. And she thought: 'Let him burn, the——!' A vile word clung in her brain and would not come forth. She could just see his figure hunched now all in a heap, she could hear his teeth chattering, and the sound gave her pleasure. Then he was quite silent, and she, too, held her breath. Was he asleep? The thought of this sleep, while she lay there consumed with rage, was too much for her. She uttered a little furious sound. He did not look up, but his foot moved, and a loosened cinder fell; there was again silence. She began creeping to the foot of the bed. Crouching there, with loins curved, and her face bent down between her stretched-out arms, she was close above his huddled figure; so close that with her hands she could have seized and twisted back his head. In fancy she was already doing this, putting her eyes close to his, setting her teeth in his forehead—so vividly that she had the taste of blood in her mouth. Suddenly she recoiled, burying her face between her arms, on the ragged bed coverlet. For some minutes she stayed thus, crouched like a wild cat on a branch. There was a dreadful sore feeling within her. She was thinking of the first night they had come home to that room; she

was remembering his kisses. Something clicked in her throat. She no longer wished to tear and bite, and she raised her face. He had not stirred. She could just see the outline of his cheek and chin; beardless, of a boy, utterly still, as if dead. She felt cold, and afraid. What was this silence? She could not even hear him breathe. She slid down on the floor. His eyes were open, very colourless, staring at the dying fire; his cheeks were hollow, his lips seemed to have no blood in them. But they moved, shivering desperately. So he was not dead! Only frozen and starved as he had been when he came back to her those two other times. The mask of her face let nothing be seen of her thoughts and feelings, but her teeth bit into her lower lip. So this was how he had come back to her once more!

The last of the fuel in the grate suddenly flickered into flame. He turned his head towards her. By the light of that feeble fire his eyes were like the eyes of her baby; they seemed to ask her for something; they looked so helpless; all his shuddering form seemed helpless. He muttered something; but his shivering choked the words, so that all that came to her was a sound such as her baby made. And at that sound something in her heart gave way; she pulled his head down on her breast, and with all her strength clutched him to her.

And as the fire died, she still held him there, rocking him and sobbing, and once more trying to give him of the warmth of her little body.

1910.

XVI

A SIMPLE TALE

ALKING of anti-Semitism one of those mornings, Ferrand said in his good French: "Yes, *monsieur*, plenty of those gentlemen in these days esteem themselves Christian, but I have only once met a Christian who esteemed himself a Jew. *C'était très drôle—je vais vous conter cela.*

"It was one autumn in London, and, the season being over, I was naturally in poverty, inhabiting a palace in Westminster at fourpence the night. In the next bed to me that time there was an old gentleman, so thin that one might truly say he was made of air. English, Scotch, Irish, Welsh—I shall never learn to distinguish those little differences in your race—but I well think he was English. Very feeble, very frail, white as paper, with a long grey beard, and caves in the cheeks, and speaking always softly, as if to a woman. . . . For me it was an experience to see an individual so gentle in a palace like that. His bed and bowl of broth he gained in sweeping out

the kennels of all those sorts of types who come to sleep there every night. There he spent all his day long, going out only at ten hours and a half every night, and returning at midnight less one quarter. Since I had not much to do, it was always a pleasure for me to talk with him; for, though he was certainly a little *toqué*," and Ferrand tapped his temple, "he had great charm, of an old man, never thinking of himself, no more than a fly that turns in dancing all day beneath a ceiling. If there was something he could do for one of those specimens—to sew on a button, clean a pipe, catch beasts in their clothes, or sit to see they were not stolen, even to give up his place by the fire—he would always do it with his smile so white and gentle; and in his leisure he would read the Holy Book! He inspired in me a sort of affection—there are not too many old men so kind and gentle as that, even when they are 'crackey,' as you call it. Several times I have caught him in washing the feet of one of those sots, or bathing some black eye or other, such as they often catch—a man of a spiritual refinement really remarkable; in clothes also so refined that one sometimes saw his skin. Though he had never great thing to say, he heard you like an angel, and spoke evil of no one; but, seeing that he had no more vigour than a swallow, it piqued me much

how he would go out like that every night in all the weathers at the same hour for so long a promenade of the streets. And when I interrogated him on this, he would only smile his smile of one not there, and did not seem to know very much of what I was talking. I said to myself: 'There is something here to see, if I am not mistaken. One of these good days I shall be your guardian angel while you fly the night.' For I am a connoisseur of strange things, *monsieur*, as you know; though, you may well imagine, being in the streets all day long between two boards of a sacred sandwich does not give you too strong a desire to *flâner* in the evenings. *Eh, bien!* It was a night in late October that I at last pursued him. He was not difficult to follow, seeing he had no more guile than an egg; passing first at his walk of an old shadow into your St. James's Park, along where your military types puff out their chests for the nursemaids to admire. Very slowly he went, leaning on a staff—*une canne de promenade* such as I have never seen, nearly six feet high, with an end like a shepherd's crook or the handle of a sword, a thing truly to make the *gamins* laugh—even me it made to smile, though I am not too well accustomed to mock at age and poverty, to watch him march in leaning on that cane. I remember that night—very beautiful, the

sky of a clear dark, the stars as bright as they can ever be in these towns of our high civilisation, and the leaf-shadows of the plane-trees, colour of grapes on the pavement, so that one had not the heart to put foot on them. One of those evenings when the spirit is light, and policemen a little dreamy and well-wishing. Well, as I tell you, my Old marched, never looking behind him, like a man who walks in sleep. By that big church—which, like all those places, had its air of coldness, far and ungrateful among us others, little human creatures who have built it—he passed, into the great Eaton Square, whose houses ought well to be inhabited by people very rich. There he crossed to lean him against the railings of the garden in the centre, very tranquil, his long white beard falling over hands joined on his staff, in awaiting what—I could not figure to myself at all. It was the hour when your high *bourgeoisie* return from the theatre in their carriages, whose manikins sit, the arms crossed, above horses fat as snails. And one would see through the window some lady *bercée doucement*, with the face of one who has eaten too much and loved too little. And gentlemen passed me, marching for a mouthful of fresh air, *très comme il faut*, their concertina hats pushed up, and nothing at all in their eyes. I remarked my Old, who, making no movement,

watched them all as they went by, till presently a carriage stopped at a house nearly opposite. At once, then, he began to cross the road quickly, carrying his great stick. I observed the lackey pulling the bell and opening the carriage door, and three people coming forth—a man, a woman, a young man. Very high *bourgeoisie*, some judge, knight, mayor—what do I know?—with his wife and son, mounting under the porch. My Old had come to the bottom of the steps, and spoke, in bending himself forward, as if supplicating. At once those three turned their faces, very astonished. Although I was very intrigued, I could not hear what he was saying, for, if I came nearer, I feared he would see me spying on him. Only the sound of his voice I heard, gentle as always; and his hand I saw wiping his forehead, as though he had carried something heavy from very far. Then the lady spoke to her husband, and went into the house, and the young son followed in lighting a cigarette. There rested only that good father of the family, with his grey whiskers and nose a little bent, carrying an expression as if my Old were making him ridiculous. He made a quick gesture, as though he said, 'Go!' then he too fled softly. The door was shut. At once the lackey mounted, the carriage drove away, and all was as if it had never been, except that my Old was

standing there, quite still. But soon he came returning, carrying his staff as if it burdened him. And recoiling in a porch to see him pass I saw his visage full of dolour, of one overwhelmed with fatigue and grief; so that I felt my heart squeeze me. I must well confess, *monsieur*, I was a little shocked to see this old sainted father asking as it seemed for alms. That is a thing I myself have never done, not even in the greatest poverty—one is not like your 'gentlemen'—one does always some little thing for the money he receives, if it is only to show a drunken man where he lives. And I returned in meditating deeply over this problem, which well seemed to me fit for the angels to examine; and knowing what time my Old was always re-entering, I took care to be in my bed before him. He came in as ever, treading softly so as not to wake us others, and his face had again its serenity, a little 'crackey.' As you may well have remarked, *monsieur*, I am not one of those individuals who let everything grow under the nose without pulling them up to see how they are made. For me the greatest pleasure is to lift the skirts of life, to unveil what there is under the surface of things which are not always what they seem, as says your good little poet. For that one must have philosophy, and a certain industry, lacking to all those gentlemen who

think they alone are industrious because they sit in chairs and blow into the telephone all day, in filling their pockets with money. Myself, I coin knowledge of the heart—it is the only gold they cannot take from you. So that night I lay awake. I was not content with what I had seen; for I could not imagine why this old man, so unselfish, so like a saint in thinking ever of others, should go thus every night to beg, when he had always in this palace his bed, and that with which to keep his soul within his rags. Certainly we all have our vices, and gentlemen the most revered do, in secret, things they would cough to see others doing; but that business of begging seemed scarcely in his character of an old altruist—for in my experience, *monsieur*, beggars are not less egoist than millionaires. As I say, it piqued me much, and I resolved to follow him again. The second night was of the most different. There was a great wind, and white clouds flying in the moonlight. He commenced his pilgrimage in passing by your House of Commons, as if toward the river. I like much that great river of yours. There is in its career something of very grand; it ought to know many things, although it is so silent, and gives to no one the secrets which are confided to it. He had for objective, it seemed, that long row of houses very respectable, which gives on the

Embankment, before you arrive at Chelsea. It was painful to see the poor Old, bending almost double against that great wind coming from the west. Not too many carriages down here, and few people—a true wilderness, lighted by tall lamps which threw no shadows, so clear was the moon. He took his part soon, as of the other night, standing on the far side of the road, watching for the return of some lion to his den. And presently I saw one coming, accompanied by three lionesses, all taller than himself. This one was bearded, and carried spectacles—a real head of learning; walking, too, with the step of a man who knows his world. Some professor—I said to myself—with his harem. They gained their house at fifty paces from my Old; and, while this learned one was opening the door, the three ladies lifted their noses in looking at the moon. A little of æsthetic, a little of science—as always with that type there! At once I had perceived my Old coming across, blown by the wind like a grey stalk of thistle; and his face, with its expression of infinite pain as if carrying the sufferings of the world. At the moment they see him those three ladies drop their noses, and fly within the house as if he were the pestilence, in crying, 'Henry!' And out comes my *monsieur* again, in his beard and spectacles. For me, I would freely have given

my ears to hear, but I saw that this good Henry had his eye on me, and I did not budge, for fear to seem in conspiracy. I heard him only say: 'Impossible! Impossible! Go to the proper place!' and he shut the door. My Old remained, with his long staff resting on a shoulder bent as if that stick were of lead. And presently he commenced to march again whence he had come, curved and trembling, the very shadow of a man, passing me, too, as if I were the air. That time also I regained my bed before him, in meditating very deeply, still more uncertain of the psychology of this affair, and resolved once again to follow him, saying to myself: 'This time I shall run all risks to hear.' There are two kinds of men in this world, *monsieur*, one who will not rest content till he has become master of all the toys that make a fat existence—in never looking to see of what they are made; and the other, for whom life is tobacco and a crust of bread, and liberty to take all to pieces, so that his spirit may feel good within him. Frankly, I am of that kind. I rest never till I have found out why this is that; for me mystery is the salt of life, and I must well eat of it. I put myself again, then, to following him the next night. This time he traversed those little dirty streets of your great Westminster where all is mixed in a true pudding of lords and poor

wretches at two sous the dozen; of cats and policemen; kerosene flames, abbeys, and the odour of fried fish. Ah! truly it is frightful to see your low streets in London; that gives me a conviction of hopelessness such as I have never caught elsewhere; piquant, too, to find them so near to that great House which sets example of good government to all the world. There is an irony so ferocious there, *monsieur*, that one can well hear the good God of your *bourgeois* laugh in every wheel that rolls, and the cry of each cabbage that is sold; and see him smile in the smoky light of every flare, and in the candles of your cathedral, in saying to himself: 'I have well made this world. Is there not variety here?—*en voilà une bonne soupe!*' This time, however, I attended my Old like his very shadow, and could hear him sighing as he marched, as if he also found the atmosphere of those streets too strong. But all of a sudden he turned a corner, and we were in the most quiet, most beautiful little street I have seen in all your London. It was of small, old houses, very regular, which made as if they inclined themselves in their two rows before a great church at the end, grey in the moonlight, like a mother. There was no one in that street, and no more cover than hair on the head of a pope. But I had some confidence now that my Old would

not remark me standing there so close, since in these pilgrimages he seemed to remark nothing. Leaning on his staff, I tell you he had the air of an old bird in a desert, reposing on one leg by a dry pool, his soul looking for water. It gave me that notion one has sometimes in watching the rare spectacles of life—that sentiment which, according to me, pricks artists to their work. We had not stayed there too long before I saw a couple marching from the end of the street, and thought: 'Here they come to their nest.' Vigorous and gay they were, young married ones, eager to get home; one could see the white neck of the young wife, the white shirt of the young man, gleaming under their cloaks. I know them well, those young couples in great cities, without a care, taking all things, the world before them, *très amoureux*, without, as yet, children; jolly and pathetic, having life still to learn—which, believe me, *monsieur*, is a sad enough affair for nine rabbits out of ten. They stopped at the house next to where I stood; and, since my Old was coming fast as always to the feast, I put myself at once to the appearance of ringing the bell of the house before me. This time I had well the chance of hearing. I could see, too, the faces of all three, because I have by now the habit of seeing out of the back hair. The pigeons were so anxious to get to their

nest that my Old had only the time to speak, as they were in train to vanish. 'Sir, let me rest in your doorway!' *Monsieur*, I have never seen a face so hopeless, so cribbled with fatigue, yet so full of a gentle dignity as that of my Old while he spoke those words. It was as if something looked from his visage surpassing what belongs to us others, so mortal and so cynic as human life must well render all who dwell in this earthly paradise. He held his long staff upon one shoulder, and I had the idea, sinister enough, that it was crushing his body of a spectre down into the pavement. I know not how the impression came, but it seemed to me that this devil of a stick had the nature of a heavy cross reposing on his shoulder; I had pain to prevent myself turning, to find if in truth 'I had them' as your drunkards say. Then the young man called out: 'Here's a shilling for you, my friend!' But my Old did not budge, answering always: 'Sir, let me rest in your doorway!' As you may well imagine, *monsieur*, we were all in the silence of astonishment, I pulling away at my bell next door, which was not ringing, seeing I took care it did not; and those two young people regarding my Old with eyes round as moons, out of their pigeon-house, which I could well see was prettily feathered. Their hearts were making seesaw, I could tell; for at that age

one is still impressionable. Then the girl put herself to whispering, and her husband said those two words of your young 'gentlemen,' 'Awfully sorry!' and put out his hand, which held now a coin large as a saucer. But again my Old only said: 'Sir, let me rest in your doorway!' And the young man drew back his hand quickly as if he were ashamed, and saying again, 'Sorry!' he shut the door. I have heard many sighs in my time—they are the good little accompaniments to the song we sing, we others who are in poverty; but the sigh my Old pushed then—how can I tell you—had an accent as if it came from Her, the faithful companion, who marches in holding the hands of men and women so that they may never make the grand mistake to imagine themselves for a moment the good God. Yes, *monsieur*, it was as if pushed by Suffering herself, that bird of the night, never tired of flying in this world where they talk always of cutting her wings. Then I took my resolution, and, coming gently from behind, said: 'My Old—what is it? Can I do anything for you?' Without looking at me, he spoke as to himself: 'I shall never find one who will let me rest in his doorway. For my sin I shall wander forever!' At this moment, *monsieur*, there came to me an inspiration so clear that I marvelled I had not already had it a long time

before. He thought himself the Wandering Jew! I had well found it. This was certainly his fixed idea, of a cracked old man! And I said: 'My Jew, do you know this? In doing what you do, you have become as Christ, in a world of wandering Jews!' But he did not seem to hear me, and only just as we arrived at our palace became again that old gentle being, thinking never of himself."

Behind the smoke of his cigarette, a smile curled Ferrand's red lips under his long nose a little on one side.

"And, if you think of it, *monsieur*, it is well like that. Provided there exists always that good man of a Wandering Jew, he will certainly have become as Christ, in all these centuries of being refused from door to door. Yes, yes, he must well have acquired charity the most profound that this world has ever seen, in watching the crushing virtue of others. All those gentry, of whom he asks night by night to let him rest in their doorways, they tell him where to go, how to *ménager* his life, even offer him money, as I had seen; but, to let him rest, to trust him in their houses—this strange old man—as a fellow, a brother voyager —that they will not; it is hardly in the character of good citizens in a Christian country. And, as I have indicated to you, this Old of mine, cracked as he was, thinking himself that Jew who refused

rest to the good Christ, had become, in being refused for ever, the most Christ-like man I have ever encountered on this earth, which, according to me, is composed almost entirely of those who have themselves the character of the Wandering Jew."

Puffing out a sigh of smoke, Ferrand added: "I do not know whether he continued to pursue his idea, for I myself took the road next morning, and I have never seen him since."

1914.

XVII

ULTIMA THULE

LTIMA THULE! The words come into my head this winter night. That is why I write down the story, as I know it, of a little old friend.

I used to see him first in Kensington Gardens, where he came in the afternoons, accompanied by a very small girl. One would see them silent before a shrub or flower, or with their heads inclined to heaven before a tree, or leaning above water and the ducks, or stretched on their stomachs watching a beetle, or on their backs watching the sky. Often they would stand holding crumbs out to the birds, who would perch about them, and even drop on their arms little white marks of affection and esteem. They were admittedly a noticeable couple. The child, who was fair-haired and elfinlike, with dark eyes and a pointed chin, wore clothes that seemed somewhat hard put to it. And, if the two were not standing still, she went along pulling at his hand,

eager to get there; and, since he was a very little light old man, he seemed always in advance of his own feet. He was garbed, if I remember, in a daverdy brown overcoat and broad-brimmed soft grey hat, and his trousers, what was visible of them, were tucked into half-length black gaiters which tried to join with very old brown shoes. Indeed, his costume did not indicate any great share of prosperity. But it was his face that riveted attention. Thin, cherry-red, and wind-dried as old wood, it had a special sort of brightness, with its spikes and waves of silvery hair, and blue eyes which seemed to shine. Rather mad, I used to think. Standing by the rails of an enclosure, with his withered lips pursed and his cheeks drawn in till you would think the wind might blow through them, he would emit the most enticing trills and pipings, exactly imitating various birds.

Those who rouse our interest are generally the last people we speak to, for interest seems to set up a kind of special shyness; so it was long before I made his acquaintance. But one day by the Serpentine, I saw him coming along alone, looking sad, but still with that queer brightness about him. He sat down on my bench with his little dried hands on his thin little knees, and began talking to himself in a sort of whisper. Presently I

caught the words: "God cannot be like us." And for fear that he might go on uttering such precious remarks that were obviously not intended to be heard, I had either to go away or else address him. So, on an impulse, I said:

"Why?"

He turned without surprise.

"I've lost my landlady's little girl," he said. "Dead! And only seven years old."

"That little thing I used to watch you with?"

"Did you? Did you? I'm glad you saw her."

"I used to see you looking at flowers, and trees, and those ducks."

His face brightened wistfully. "Yes; she was a great companion to an old man like me." And he relapsed into his contemplation of the water. He had a curious, precise way of speaking, that matched his pipchinesque little old face. At last he again turned to me those blue youthful eyes which seemed to shine out of a perfect little nest of crow's-feet.

"We were great friends! But I couldn't expect it. Things don't last, do they?" I was glad to notice that his voice was getting cheerful. "When I was in the orchestra at the Harmony Theatre, it never used to occur to me that some day I shouldn't play there any more. One felt like a bird. That's the beauty of music, sir. You lose

yourself; like that blackbird there." He imitated the note of a blackbird so perfectly that I could have sworn the bird started.

"Birds and flowers! Wonderful things; wonderful! Why, even a buttercup——!" He pointed at one of those little golden flowers with his toe. "Did you ever see such a marvellous thing?" And he turned his face up at me. "And yet, somebody told me once that they don't agree with cows. Now can that be? I'm not a countryman—though I was born at Kingston."

"The cows do well enough on them," I said, "in my part of the world. In fact, the farmers say they like to see buttercups."

"I'm glad to hear you say that. I was always sorry to think they disagreed."

When I got up to go, he rose, too.

"I take it as very kind of you," he said, "to have spoken to me."

"The pleasure was mine. I am generally to be found hereabouts in the afternoons any time you like a talk."

"Delighted," he said; "delighted. I make friends of the creatures and flowers as much as possible, but they can't always make us understand." And after we had taken off our respective hats, he reseated himself, with his hands on his knees.

Next time I came across him standing by the rails of an enclosure, and, in his arms, an old and really wretched-looking cat.

"I don't like boys," he said, without preliminary of any sort. "What do you think they were doing to this poor old cat? Dragging it along by a string to drown it; see where it's cut into the fur! I think boys despise the old and weak!" He held it out to me. At the ends of those little sticks of arms the beast looked more dead than alive; I had never seen a more miserable creature.

"I think a cat," he said, "is one of the most marvellous things in the world. Such a depth of life in it."

And, as he spoke, the cat opened its mouth as if protesting at that assertion. It *was* the sorriest-looking beast.

"What are you going to do with it?"

"Take it home; it looks to me as if it might die."

"You don't think that might be more merciful?"

"It depends; it depends. I shall see. I fancy a little kindness might do a great deal for it. It's got plenty of spirit. I can see from its eye."

"May I come along with you a bit?"

"Oh!" he said; "delighted."

We walked on side by side, exciting the derision

of nearly every one we passed—his face looked so like a mother's when she is feeding her baby!

"You'll find this'll be quite a different cat to-morrow," he said. "I shall have to get in, though, without my landlady seeing; a funny woman! I have two or three strays already."

"Can I help in any way?"

"Thank you," he said. "I shall ring the area bell, and as she comes out below I shall go in above. She'll think it's boys. They *are* like that."

"But doesn't she do your rooms, or anything?"

A smile puckered his face. "I've only one; I do it myself. Oh, it'd never do to have her about, even if I could afford it. But," he added, "if you're so kind as to come with me to the door, you might engage her by asking where Mr. Thompson lives. That's me. In the musical world my name was Moronelli; not that I have Italian blood in me, of course."

"And shall I come up?"

"Honoured; but I live very quietly."

We passed out of the gardens at Lancaster Gate, where all the house-fronts seem so successful, and out of it into a little street that was extremely like a grubby child trying to hide under its mother's skirts. Here he took a newspaper from his pocket and wrapped it round the cat.

"She's a funny woman," he repeated; "Scotch descent, you know." Suddenly he pulled an area bell and scuttled up the steps.

When he had opened the door, however, I saw before him in the hall a short, thin woman dressed in black, with a sharp and bumpy face. Her voice sounded brisk and resolute.

"What have you got there, Mr. Thompson?"

"Newspaper, Mrs. March."

"Oh, indeed! Now, you're not going to take that cat up-stairs!"

The little old fellow's voice acquired a sudden shrill determination. "Stand aside, please. If you stop me, I'll give you notice. The cat is going up. It's ill, and it is going up."

It was then I said:

"Does Mr. Thompson live here?"

In that second he shot past her, and ascended.

"That's him," she said; "and I wish it wasn't, with his dirty cats. Do you want him?"

"I do."

"He lives at the top." Then, with a grudging apology: "I can't help it; he tries me—he's very trying."

"I am sure he is."

She looked at me. The longing to talk that comes over those who answer bells all day, and the peculiar Scottish desire to justify oneself, rose

together in that face which seemed all promontories dried by an east wind.

"Ah!" she said; "he is. I don't deny his heart; but he's got no sense of anything. Goodness knows what he hasn't got up there. I wonder I keep him. An old man like that ought to know better; half-starving himself to feed them." She paused, and her eyes, which had a cold and honest glitter, searched me closely.

"If you're going up," she said, "I hope you'll give him good advice. He never lets me in. I wonder I keep him."

There were three flights of stairs, narrow, clean, and smelling of oilcloth. Selecting one of two doors at random, I knocked. His silvery head and bright, pinched face were cautiously poked out.

"Ah!" he said; "I thought it might be her!"

The room, which was fairly large, had a bare floor with little on it save a camp-bed and chest of drawers with jug and basin. A large bird-cage on the wall hung wide open. The place smelt of soap and a little of beasts and birds. Into the walls, whitewashed over a green wall-paper which stared through in places, were driven nails with their heads knocked off, onto which bits of wood had been spiked, so that they stood out as bird-perches high above the ground. Over the

open window a piece of wire netting had been fixed. A little spirit-stove and an old dressing-gown hanging on a peg completed the accoutrements of a room which one entered with a certain diffidence. He had not exaggerated. Besides the new cat, there were three other cats and four birds, all—save one, a bullfinch—invalids. The cats kept close to the walls, avoiding me, but wherever my little old friend went, they followed him with their eyes. The birds were in the cage, except the bullfinch, which had perched on his shoulder.

"How on earth," I said, "do you manage to keep cats and birds in one room?"

"There is danger," he answered, "but I have not had a disaster yet. Till their legs or wings are mended, they hardly come out of the cage; and after that they keep up on my perches. But they don't stay long, you know, when they're once well. That wire is only put over the window while they're mending; it'll be off to-morrow, for this lot."

"And then they'll go?"

"Yes. The sparrow first, and then the two thrushes."

"And this fellow?"

"Ask him," he said. "Would *you* go, bully?" But the bullfinch did not deign to answer.

"And were all those cats, too, in trouble?"

"Yes," he said. "They wouldn't want me if they weren't."

Thereupon he began to warm some blue-looking milk, contemplating the new cat, which he had placed in a round basket close to the little stove, while the bullfinch sat on his head. It seemed time to go.

"Delighted to see you, sir," he said, "any day." And, pointing up at the bullfinch on his head, he added: "Did you ever see anything so wonderful as that bird? The size of its heart! Really marvellous!"

To the rapt sound of that word marvellous, and full of the memory of his mysterious brightness while he stood pointing upward to the bird perched on his thick, silvery hair, I went.

The landlady was still at the bottom of the stairs, and began at once: "So you found him! I don't know why I keep him. Of course, he was kind to my little girl." I saw tears gather in her eyes.

"With his cats and his birds, I wonder I keep him! But where would he go? He's no relations, and no friends—not a friend in the world, I think! He's a character. Lives on air—feeding them cats! I've no patience with them, eating

him up. He never lets me in. Cats and birds! I wonder I keep him. Losing himself for those rubbishy things! It's my belief he was always like that; and that's why he never got on. He's no sense of anything."

And she gave me a shrewd look, wondering, no doubt, what the deuce I had come about.

I did not come across him again in the gardens for some time, and went at last to pay him a call. At the entrance to a mews just round the corner of his grubby little street, I found a knot of people collected round one of those bears that are sometimes led through the less conspicuous streets of our huge towns. The yellowish beast was sitting up in deference to its master's rod, uttering little grunts, and moving its uplifted snout from side to side, in the way bears have. But it seemed to be extracting more amusement than money from its audience.

"Let your bear down off its hind legs and I'll give you a penny." And suddenly I saw my little old friend under his flopping grey hat, amongst the spectators, all taller than himself. But the bear's master only grinned and prodded the animal in the chest. He evidently knew a good thing when he saw it.

"I'll give you twopence to let him down."

Again the bear-man grinned. "More!" he said,

and again prodded the bear's chest. The spectators were laughing now.

"Threepence! And if you don't let him down for that, I'll hit you in the eye."

The bear-man held out his hand. "All a-right," he said, "threepence: I let him down."

I saw the coins pass and the beast dropping on his forefeet; but just then a policeman coming in sight, the man led his bear off, and I was left alone with my little old friend.

"I wish I had that poor bear," he said; "I could teach him to be happy. But, even if I could buy him, what could I do with him up there? She's such a funny woman."

He looked quite dim, but brightened as we went along.

"A bear," he said, "is really an extraordinary animal. What wise little eyes he has! I do think he's a marvellous creation! My cats will have to go without their dinner, though. I was going to buy it with that threepence."

I begged to be allowed the privilege.

"Willingly!" he said. "Shall we go in here? They like cod's head best."

While we stood waiting to be served I saw the usual derisive smile pass over the fishmonger's face. But my little old friend by no means noticed it; he was too busy looking at the fish. "A fish is a

marvellous thing, when you come to think of it," he murmured. "Look at its scales. Did you ever see such mechanism?"

We bought five cod's heads, and I left him carrying them in a bag, evidently lost in the anticipation of five cats eating them.

After that I saw him often, going with him sometimes to buy food for his cats, which seemed ever to increase in numbers. His talk was always of his strays, and the marvels of creation, and that time of his life when he played the flute at the Harmony Theatre. He had been out of a job, it seemed, for more than ten years; and, when questioned, only sighed and answered: "Don't talk about it, please!"

His bumpy landlady never failed to favour me with a little conversation. She was one of those women who have terrific consciences, and terrible grudges against them.

"I never get out," she would say.

"Why not?"

"Couldn't leave the house."

"It won't run away!"

But she would look at me as if she thought it might, and repeat:

"Oh! I never get out."

An extremely Scottish temperament.

Considering her descent, however, she was

curiously devoid of success, struggling on apparently from week to week, cleaning, and answering the bell, and never getting out, and wondering why she kept my little old friend; just as he struggled on from week to week, getting out and collecting strays, and discovering the marvels of creation, and finding her a funny woman. Their hands were joined, one must suppose, by that dead child.

One July afternoon, however, I found her very much upset. He had been taken dangerously ill three days before.

"There he is," she said; "can't touch a thing. It's my belief he's done for himself, giving his food away all these years to those cats of his. I shooed 'em out to-day, the nasty creatures; they won't get in again."

"Oh!" I said, "you shouldn't have done that. It'll only make him miserable."

She flounced her head up. "Hoh!" she said, "I wonder I've kept him all this time, with his birds and his cats dirtying my house. And there he lies, talking gibberish about them. He made me write to a Mr. Jackson, of some theatre or other—I've no patience with him. And that little bullfinch all the time perching on his pillow, the dirty little thing! I'd have turned it out, too, only it wouldn't let me catch it."

"What does the doctor say?"

"Double pneumonia—caught it getting his feet wet, after some stray, I'll be bound. I'm nursing him. There has to be some one with him all the time."

He was lying very still when I went up, with the sunlight falling across the foot of his bed, and, sure enough, the bullfinch perching on his pillow. In that high fever he looked brighter than ever. He was not exactly delirious, yet not exactly master of his thoughts.

"Mr. Jackson! He'll be here soon. Mr. Jackson! He'll do it for me. I can ask him, if I die. A funny woman. I don't want to eat; I'm not a great eater—I want my breath, that's all."

At sound of his voice the bullfinch fluttered off the pillow and flew round and round the room, as if alarmed at something new in the tones that were coming from its master.

Then he seemed to recognise me. "I think I'm going to die," he said; "I'm very weak. It's lucky there's nobody to mind. If only he'd come soon. I wish"—and he raised himself with feeble excitement—"I wish you'd take that wire off the window; I want my cats. She turned them out. I want him to promise me to take them, and bully-boy, and feed them with my money, when I'm dead."

Seeing that excitement was certainly worse for him than cats, I took the wire off. He fell back, quiet at once; and presently, first one and then another cat came stealing in, till there were four or five seated against the walls. The moment he ceased to speak the bullfinch, too, came back to his pillow. His eyes looked most supernaturally bright, staring out of his little, withered-up old face at the sunlight playing on his bed; he said just audibly: "Did you ever see anything more wonderful than that sunlight? It's really marvellous!" After that he fell into a sort of doze or stupor. And I continued to sit there in the window, relieved, but rather humiliated, that he had not asked me to take care of his cats and bullfinch.

Presently there came the sound of a motor-car in the little street below. And almost at once the landlady appeared. For such an abrupt woman, she entered very softly.

"Here he is," she whispered.

I went out and found a gentleman, perhaps sixty years of age, in a black coat, buff waistcoat, gold watch-chain, light trousers, patent-leather boots, and a wonderfully shining hat. His face was plump and red, with a glossy grey moustache; indeed, he seemed to shine everywhere, save in the eyes, which were of a dull and somewhat liverish hue.

"Mr. Jackson?"

"The same. How is the little old chap?"

Opening the door of the next room, which I knew was always empty, I beckoned Mr. Jackson in.

"He's really very ill; I'd better tell you what he wants to see you about."

He looked at me with that air of "You can't get at me—whoever you may be," which belongs to the very successful.

"Right-o!" he said. "Well?"

I described the situation. "He seems to think," I ended, "that you'll be kind enough to charge yourself with his strays, in case he should die."

Mr. Jackson prodded the unpainted wash-stand with his gold-headed cane.

"Is he really going to kick it?"

"I'm afraid so; he's nothing but skin, bone, and spirit, as it is."

"H'm! Stray cats, you say, and a bird! Well, there's no accounting. He was always a cracky little chap. So that's it! When I got the letter I wondered what the deuce! We pay him his five quid a quarter regular to this day. To tell truth, he deserved it. Thirty years he was at our shop; never missed a night. First-rate flute he was. He ought never to have given it up, though I always thought it showed a bit of heart in him. If a man

don't look after number one, he's as good as gone; that's what I've always found. Why, I was no more than he was when I started. Shouldn't have been worth a plum if I'd gone on his plan, that's certain." And he gave that profound chuckle which comes from the very stomach of success. "We were having a rocky time at the Harmony; had to cut down everything we could—music, well, that came about first. Little old Moronelli, as we used to call him—old Italian days before English names came in, you know—he was far the best of the flutes; so I went to him and said: 'Look here, Moronelli, which of these other boys had better go?' 'Oh!' he said—I remember his funny little old mug now—'has one of them to go, Mr. Jackson? Timminsa'—that was the elder—'he's a wife and family; and Smetoni'—Smith, you know—'he's only a boy. Times are bad for flutes.' 'I know it's a bit hard,' I said, 'but this theatre's goin' to be run much cheaper; one of 'em's got to get.' 'Oh!' he said, 'dear me!' he said. What a funny little old chap it was! Well—what do you think? Next day I had his resignation. Give you my word I did my best to turn him. Why, he was sixty then if he was a day—at sixty a man don't get jobs in a hurry. But, not a bit of it! All he'd say was: 'I shall get a place all right!' But that's it, you know—he

never did. Too long in one shop. I heard by accident he was on the rocks; that's how I make him that allowance. But that's the sort of hopeless little old chap he is—no idea of himself. Cats! Why not? I'll take his old cats on; don't you let him worry about that. I'll see to his bird, too. If I can't give 'em a better time than ever they have here, it'll be funny!" And, looking round the little empty room, he again uttered that profound chuckle: "Why, he was with us at the Harmony thirty years—that's time, you know; *I* made my fortune in it."

"I'm sure," I said, "it'll be a great relief to him."

"Oh! Ah! That's all right. You come down to my place"—he handed me a card: 'Mr. Cyril Porteus Jackson, Ultima Thule, Winbledon'—"and see how I fix 'em up. But if he's really going to kick it, I'd like to have a look at the little old chap, just for old times' sake."

We went, as quietly as Mr. Jackson's bright boots would permit, into his room, where the landlady was sitting gazing angrily at the cats. She went out without noise, flouncing her head as much as to say: 'Well, now you can see what I have to go through, sitting up here. I never get out.'

Our little old friend was still in that curious

stupor. He seemed unconscious, but his blue eyes were not closed, staring brightly out before them at things we did not see. With his silvery hair and his flushed frailty, he had an unearthly look. After standing perhaps three minutes at the foot of the bed, Mr. Jackson whispered:

"Well, he does look queer. Poor little old chap! You tell him from me I'll look after his cats and bird; he needn't worry. And now, I think I won't keep the car. Makes me feel a bit throaty, you know. Don't move; he might come to."

And, leaning all the weight of his substantial form on those bright and creaking toes, he made his way to the door, flashed at me a diamond ring, whispered hoarsely: "So long! That'll be all right!" and vanished. And soon I heard the whirring of his car and just saw the top of his shiny hat travelling down the little street.

Some time I sat on there, wanting to deliver that message. An uncanny vigil in the failing light, with those five cats—yes, five at least—lying or sitting against the walls, staring like sphinxes at their motionless protector. I could not make out whether it was he in his stupor with his bright eyes that fascinated them, or the bullfinch perched on his pillow, whom they knew perhaps might soon be in their power. I was glad

when the landlady came up and I could leave the message with her.

When she opened the door to me next day at six o'clock I knew that he was gone. There was about her that sorrowful, unmistakable importance, that peculiar mournful excitement, which hovers over houses where death has entered.

"Yes," she said, "he went this morning. Never came round after you left. Would you like to see him?"

We went up.

He lay, covered with a sheet, in the darkened room. The landlady pulled the window-curtains apart. His face, as white now almost as his silvery head, had in the sunlight a radiance like that of a small, bright angel gone to sleep. No growth of hair, such as comes on most dead faces, showed on those frail cheeks that were now smooth and lineless as porcelain. And on the sheet above his chest the bullfinch sat, looking into his face.

The landlady let the curtains fall, and we went out.

"I've got the cats in here"—she pointed to the room where Mr. Jackson and I had talked—"all ready for that gentleman when he sends. But that little bird, I don't know what to do; he won't let me catch him, and there he sits. It makes me feel all funny."

It had made me feel all funny, too.

"He hasn't left the money for his funeral. Dreadful, the way he never thought about himself. I'm glad I kept him, though." And, not to my astonishment, she suddenly began to cry.

A wire was sent to Mr. Jackson, and on the day of the funeral I went down to "Ultima Thule," Wimbledon, to see if he had carried out his promise.

He had. In the grounds, past the vinery, an outhouse had been cleaned and sanded, with cushions placed at intervals against the wall, and a little trough of milk. Nothing could have been more suitable or luxurious.

"How's that?" he said. "I've done it thoroughly." But I noticed that he looked a little glum.

"The only thing," he said, "is the cats. First night they seemed all right; and the second, there were three of 'em left. But to-day the gardener tells me there's not the ghost of one anywhere. It's not for want of feeding. They've had tripe, and liver, and milk—as much as ever they liked. And cod's heads, you know—they're very fond of them. I must say it's a bit of a disappointment to me."

As he spoke, a sandy cat which I perfectly re-

membered, for it had only half its left ear, appeared in the doorway, and stood, crouching, with its green eyes turned on us; then, hearing Mr. Jackson murmur, "Puss, puss!" it ran for its life, slinking almost into the ground, and vanished among some shrubs.

Mr. Jackson sighed. "Perversity of the brutes!" he said. He led me back to the house through a conservatory full of choice orchids. A gilt bird-cage was hanging there, one of the largest I had ever seen, replete with every luxury the heart of bird could want.

"Is that for the bullfinch?" I asked him.

"Oh!" he said; "didn't you know? The little beggar wouldn't let himself be caught, and the second morning, when they went up, there he lay on the old chap's body, dead. I thought it was very touchin'. But I kept the cage hung up for you to see that I should have given him a good time here. Oh, yes, 'Ultima Thule' would have done him well!"

And from a bright leather case Mr. Jackson offered me a cigar.

The question I had long been wishing to ask him slipped out of me then:

"Do you mind telling me why you called your house 'Ultima Thule'?"

"Why?" he said. "Found it on the gate.

Think it's rather distingué, don't you?" and he uttered his profound chuckle.

"First-rate. The whole place is the last word in comfort."

"Very good of you to say so," he said. "I've laid out a goodish bit on it. A man must have a warm corner to end his days in. 'Ultima Thule,' as you say—it isn't bad. There's success about it, somehow."

And with that word in my ears, and in my eyes a vision of the little old fellow in *his* "Ultima Thule," with the bullfinch lying dead on a heart that had never known success, I travelled back to town.

1914.

XVIII

THE GREY ANGEL

HER predilection for things French came from childish recollections of school-days in Paris and a hasty removal thence by her father during the revolution of '48; of later travels as a little maiden, by diligence, to Pau and the then undiscovered Pyrenees, to Montpellier, and a Nice as yet unspoiled. Unto her seventy-eighth year, her French accent had remained unruffled, her soul in love with French gloves and dresses; and her face had the pale, unwrinkled, slightly aquiline perfection of the French marquise type—it may, perhaps, be doubted whether any French marquise ever looked the part so perfectly.

How it came about that she had settled down in a southern French town, in the summer of 1914, only her roving spirit knew. She had been a widow ten years, which she had passed in the quest of perfection; all her life she had been haunted by that instinct, half-smothered in ministering to her husband, children, and establish-

ments in London and the country. Now, in loneliness the intrinsic independence of her soul was able to assert itself, and from hotel to hotel she had wandered in England, Wales, Switzerland, France, till she had found what seemingly arrested her. Was it the age of that oldest of Western cities, that little mother of Western civilisation, which captured her fancy? Or did a curious perversity turn her from more obvious abodes; or, again, was she kept there by the charm of a certain church which she would enter every day to steep herself in mellow darkness, the scent of incense, the drone of incantations, and quiet communion with a God higher indeed than she had been brought up to, high-church though she had always been? She had a pretty little apartment, where for very little—the bulk of her small wealth was habitually at the service of others—she could manage with one maid and no "fuss." She had some "nice" French friends there, too. But more probably it was simply the war which kept her, waiting, like so many other people, till it seemed worth while to move and re-establish herself. The immensity and wickedness of this strange event held her suspended, body and spirit, high up on the hill which had seen the ancient peoples, the Romans, Gauls, Saracens, and still looked out toward the flat Camargue. Here in her

three rooms, with a little kitchen, the maid Augustine, a parrot, and the Paris *Daily Mail*, she dwelt marooned by a world event which stunned her. Not that she worried, exactly. The defeat of her country and France never entered her head. She only grieved quietly over the dreadful things that were being done, and every now and then would glow with admiration at the beautiful way the King and Queen were behaving. It was no good to "fuss," and one must make the best of things, as the "dear little Queen" was doing—for each Queen in turn, and she had seen three reign in her time, was always that to her. Her ancestors had been uprooted from their lands, their house burned, her pedigree diverted, in the Stuart wars; and a reverence for royalty was fastened in her blood.

Quite early in the business she had begun to knit, moving her slim fingers not too fast, gazing at the grey wool through glasses, rimless and invisible, perched on the bridge of her firm, well-shaped nose, and now and then speaking to her parrot. The bird could say, "Scratch a poll, Poll," and "Hullo!" those keys to the English language. The maid Augustine, having completed some small duty, would come and stand, her head on one side, gazing down with inquiring compassion in her young, clear-brown eyes. It

seemed to her, straight and sturdy as a young tree, both wonderful and sad that *Madame* should be seventy-seven, and so frail—*Madame* who had no lines in her face and such beautiful grey hair; who had so strong a will-power, too, and knitted such soft comforters "*pour nos braves chers poilus.*" And suddenly she would say: "*Madame n'est pas fatiguée.*" And *Madame* would answer: "No. Speak English, Augustine—Polly will pick up your French!" And, reaching up a pale hand, she would set straight a stray fluff of the girl's dark-brown hair or improve the set of her fichu.

Those two got on extremely well, for though *Madame* was—Oh! but very particular, she was always "*très gentille et toujours grande dame.*" And that love of form deep in the French soul promoted the girl's admiration for one whom she could see would in no circumstances lose her dignity. Besides, *Madame* was full of dainty household devices, and could not bear waste; and these, though exacting, were qualities which appealed to Augustine. With her French passion for "the family," she used to wonder how in days like these *Madame* could endure to be far away from her son and daughter and the grandchildren, whose photographs hung on the walls; and the long letters her mistress was always writing in a

beautiful, fine hand, beginning, "My darling Sybil," "My darling Reggie," and ending always, "Your devoted mother," seemed to a warm and simple heart but meagre substitutes for flesh-and-blood realities. But, as *Madame* would inform her, they were so busy doing things for the dear soldiers, and working for the war; they could not come to her—that would never do. And to go to them would give so much trouble, when the railways were so wanted for the troops; and she had their lovely letters, which she kept—as Augustine observed—in a lavender-scented sachet, and frequently took out to read. Another point of sympathy between those two was their passion for military music and seeing soldiers pass. Augustine's brother and father were at the front, and *Madame's* dead brother had been a soldier in the Crimean War—"long before you were born, Augustine, when the French and English fought the Russians: I was in France then, too, a little girl, and we lived at Nice; the flowers were so lovely, you can't think! And my poor brother was so cold in the siege of Sebastopol." Somehow, that time and that war were more real to her than this.

In December, when the hospitals were already full, her French friends took her to the one which they attended. She went in, her face very calm,

with that curious inward composure which never deserted it, carrying in front of her a black silk bag, wherein she had concealed an astonishing collection of treasures for the poor men. A bottle of acidulated drops, packets of cigarettes, two of her own mufflers, a pocket set of draughts, some English riddles translated by herself into French (very curious), some ancient copies of an illustrated paper, boxes of chocolate, a ball of string to make "cats' cradles" (such an amusing game), her own packs of patience cards, some photograph frames, postcards of Arles, and, most singular, a kettle-holder. At the head of each bed she would sit down and rummage in the bag, speaking in her slow but quite good French, to explain the use of the acidulated drops, or to give a lesson in cats' cradles. And the *poilus* would listen with their polite, ironic patience, and be left smiling, curiously fascinated, as if they had been visited by a creature from another world. She would move on to other beds, quite unconscious of the effect she had produced on them and of their remarks: "*L'ange aux cheveux gris*" became her name within those walls. And the habit of filling that black silk bag and going there to distribute its contents soon grew to be with her a ruling passion which neither weather nor her own aches and pains, not inconsiderable, must inter-

fere with. The things she brought became more marvellous every week. But, however much she carried coals to Newcastle, or tobacco pouches to those who did not smoke, or homeopathic globules to such as crunched up the whole bottleful for the sake of the sugar as soon as her back was turned, no one ever smiled now with anything but real pleasure at the sight of her calm and truly sweet smile and the scent of soap on her pale hands. "*Cher fils, je croyais que ceci vous donnerait un peu de plaisir. Voyez-vous comme c'est commode, n'est ce pas?*" Each newcomer to the wards was warned by his comrades that the angel with the grey hair was to be taken without a smile, exactly as if she were his grandmother.

In the walk to the hospital Augustine would accompany her, carrying the bag and a large peasant's umbrella to cover them both, for the winter was hard and snowy and carriages cost money, which must now be kept entirely for the almost daily replenishment of the bag and other calls of war. The girl, to her chagrin, was always left in a safe place, for it would never do to take her in and put fancies into her head, or excite the dear soldiers with anything so taking. The visit over, they would set forth home, walking very slowly in the high, narrow streets, Augustine pouting a little and shooting swift glances at any-

thing in uniform, and *Madame* making firm her lips against a fatigue which sometimes almost overcame her before she could get home and up the stairs. And the parrot would greet them indiscreetly with new phrases—"Keep smiling!" and "Kiss Augustine!" which he sometimes varied with "Kiss a poll, Poll!" or "Scratch Augustine!" to *Madame's* regret. Tea would revive her, and then she would knit, for as time went on and the war seemed to get farther from that end which, in common with so many, she had expected before now, it seemed dreadful not to be always doing something to help the poor dear soldiers; and for dinner, to Augustine's horror, she now had nothing but soup, or an egg beaten up with milk and brandy. It saved time and expense—she was sure people ate too much; and afterward she would read the *Daily Mail*, often putting it down to sigh, and press her lips together, and think, 'One must look on the bright side of things,' and wonder a little where it was. And Augustine, finishing her work in the tiny kitchen, would sigh too, and think of red trousers and peaked caps, not yet out of date in that southern region, and of her own heart saying "Kiss Augustine!" and she would peer out between the shutters at the stars sparkling over the Camargue, or look down where the ground fell

away beyond an old wall, and nobody walked in the winter night; and muse on her nineteenth birthday coming, and sigh with the thought that she would be old before any one had loved her; and of how *Madame* was looking "*très fatiguée.*"

Indeed, *Madame* was "*très fatiguée*" in these days. The world's vitality and her own were at January ebb. But to think of oneself was impossible; it would be all right presently, and one must not fuss, or mention in one's letters to the dear children that one felt poorly. As for a doctor —that would be sinful waste, and besides, what use were they except to tell you what you knew? And she was terribly vexed when Augustine found her in a faint one morning, and she found Augustine in tears, with her hair all over her face. She rated the girl soundly for making such a fuss over "a little thing like that," and with extremely trembling fingers pushed the brown hair back and told her to wash her face, while the parrot said reflectively, "Scratch a poll—Hullo!" The girl, who had seen her own grandmother die not long before, and remembered how "*fatiguée*" she had been during her last days, was frightened. Coming back after washing her face, she found her mistress writing on a number of little envelopes the same words: "*En bonne Amitié.*"

"Take this hundred-franc note, Augustine,

and get it changed into single francs—the ironmonger will do it if you say it's for me. I am going to take a rest. I shan't buy anything for the bag for a whole week. I shall take francs instead."

"Oh, *Madame!* You must not go out: *vous êtes trop fatiguée.*"

"Nonsense! How do you suppose our dear little Queen in England would get on with all she has to do, if she were to give in like that? We must none of us give up in these days. Help me to put on my things; I am going to church."

"Oh, *Madame!* Must you go to church? It is not your kind of church. You do not pray there, do you?"

"Of course I pray there. I am very fond of the dear old church. God is in every church, Augustine; you ought to know that at your age."

"But *Madame* has her own religion?"

"Don't be silly. What does that matter? Help me into my cloth coat—not the fur—it's too heavy—and then go and get that money changed."

"But *Madame* should see a doctor. If *Madame* faints again I shall die with fright. *Madame* has no colour—but no colour at all; it must be that there is something wrong."

Madame rose, and taking the girl's ear between thumb and finger pinched it gently.

"You are a very silly girl. What would our soldiers do if all the nurses were like you?"

Reaching the church she sat down gladly, turning her face up toward her favourite picture, a Virgin standing with her Baby in her arms. It was only faintly coloured now; but there were those who said that an Arlésienne must have sat for it. Why it pleased her so she never quite knew, unless by its cool, unrestored devotion, and the faint smiling in the eyes. Religion with her was strange yet very real. She was not clever, and never even began to try and understand what she believed. If she tried to be good she would go to God—wherever God might be; and, rarely did she forget to try to be good. Sitting there she thought, or rather prayed: "Let me forget that I have a body, and remember the poor soldiers."

She shivered. It struck cold that morning in the church—the wind bitter from the north-east; some women in black were kneeling, and four candles burned in the gloom of a side aisle—thin, steady little spires of gold. There was no sound at all. A smile came on her lips. She was remembering all those young faces in the wards, the faces too of her own children far away, the faces of all she loved; and all the poor souls on land and sea, fighting and working and dying. Her lips moved in prayer: "O God, who makes the birds sing and

the stars shine and gives us little children, strengthen my heart so that I may forget my own aches and think of those of other people."

On reaching home again she took gelseminum, her favourite remedy against that shivering, which would keep coming; then, covering herself with her fur coat, she lay down. Augustine, returning with the hundred single francs, placed them noiselessly beside the little pile of envelopes, and, after looking at the motionless face of her mistress, withdrew. Two tears came out of those closed eyes and clung on the pale cheeks below. The seeming sleeper was thinking of her children, away over there in England, her children and their children. Almost unbearably she was longing for a sight of them, recalling each face, voice, different way they had of saying "Mother darling," or "Granny, look what I've got!" and thinking that if only the war would end she would pack at once and go to them, that is, if they would not come to her for a nice long holiday in this beautiful place. She thought of spring and how lovely it would be to see the trees come out again, and almond blossom against a blue sky. The war seemed so long, and winter too. But she must not complain; others had much greater sorrows—the poor widowed women kneeling in the church; the poor boys freezing in the trenches.

God in His great mercy could not allow it to last much longer! It would not be like Him! Her eyes rested gloatingly on the piles of francs and envelopes. How could she reduce still further her personal expenditure? It was so dreadful to spend on oneself—an old woman like her. Doctor, indeed! If Augustine fussed any more she would send her away and do for herself! And the parrot, leaving his cage, which he could always do, perched just behind her and said: "Hullo! Kiss me, too!"

That afternoon in the hospital every one noticed what a beautiful colour she had. "*L'ange aux cheveux gris*" had never been more popular.

She had not meant to give all the francs that day, but she saw how pleased they were, and so the whole ninety-seven had their franc each. The three over would buy Augustine a little brooch to make up to the silly child for her fright in the morning. The buying of this brooch took a long time at the jeweller's, and she had only just fixed on an amethyst before feeling deadly ill with a dreadful pain through her lungs. She went out with her tiny package quickly, not wanting any fuss, and began to mount toward home. She had only three hundred yards to go, and with each step said to herself: "Nonsense! What would the

Queen think of you? Remember the poor soldiers with only one leg! You have got both your legs! And the poor men who walk from the battlefield with bullets through the lungs. What is your pain to theirs?" But the pain, like none she had ever felt—having sharp knife edges—kept passing through and through her; her legs had no strength at all, seeming to move simply because her will said: "If you don't, I'll leave you behind. So there!" She felt as if perspiration were flowing down, yet her face was dry as a dead leaf when she put up her hand to it. Her brain stammered, came to sudden standstills. Her eyes searched painfully each grey-shuttered window for her own house, though she knew quite well that she had not reached it yet. From sheer pain she stood still, a wry smile on her lips, thinking how Polly would say: "Keep smiling!" Then she moved on, holding out her hand, as if to pull on some imaginary rope. So, foot by foot, she crept to her door. A peculiar floating sensation had come over her. The pain ceased, and—as if she had passed through no doors, mounted no stairs—she was up in her room, lying on her sofa, conscious that she was not in control of her thoughts, and that Augustine must be thinking her ridiculous. Making a great effort, she said:

"I forbid you to send for a doctor, Augustine.

I shall be all right in a day or two. And you must put on this little brooch—I bought it for you. The war will be over to-morrow, and then we will all go and have tea together in a wood. Granny will come to you, my darlings."

And when the terrified girl had rushed out she thought: 'There now! I shall get up and do for myself.' The doctor found her half-dressed, trying to feed a perch in the empty cage with a spoon, while the parrot sat on the mantelpiece, with his head on one side.

When she had been properly undressed and made to lie down on the sofa, for she would not go to bed and they dared not oppose her, the doctor made his diagnosis. It was that double pneumonia, which declares for life or death in forty-eight hours. At her age a desperate case. Her children must be wired to at once. She had sunk back, seemingly unconscious; and Augustine slipped out the lavender sachet where the letters were kept and gave it to the doctor. When he had left the room to extract addresses and send those telegrams, the girl sat down by the foot of the couch, staring at that motionless form, with tears running down her broad cheeks. For many minutes neither of them stirred, and the only sound was the restless stropping of the parrot's beak against a wire of his cage. Then the lips

moved, and the girl bent forward. A whispering came forth:

"Mind, Augustine—no one is to tell my children—I can't have them disturbed—over a little thing—like this—and in my purse you'll find another—hundred-franc note. I shall want some more francs for the day after to-morrow. Be a good girl and don't fuss. Give me my gelseminum and my prayer-book. And go to bed just as usual—we must all—keep smiling—like the dear soldiers——" The whispering ceased; then began again in delirious incoherence. The girl sat trembling, covering her ears from those uncanny sounds. She could not follow—with her little English—the swerving, intricate flights of that old spirit mazed by fever—the memories released, the longings disclosed, the half-uttered prayers, the little half-conscious efforts to regain form and dignity. She could only pray to the Virgin. When relieved by the daughter of *Madame's* French friend, who spoke good English, she murmured: "*Oh! Mademoiselle, Madame est très, très fatiguée —la pauvre tête—faut-il enlever les cheveux? Elle fait ça toujours pour elle-même.*" To the girl it seemed sacrilege to take off that crown of fine grey hair. Yet, when the old face was covered only by the thin white hair of nature, dignity still surmounted the wandering talk and the moaning

from the parched lips, which smiled and pouted, as if remembering the maxims of the parrot. So the night passed. Once her spirit seemed to recover its coherence, and she was heard to whisper: "God has given me this so that I may know what the poor soldiers suffer. Oh! they've forgotten to cover Polly's cage." But high fever soon passes from the very old; and early morning brought a deathlike exhaustion, with utter silence, save for the licking of the flames at the olive-wood logs, and the sound as they slipped or settled down, calcined. The firelight crept fantastically about the walls covered with tapestry of French-grey silk, crept round the screen-head of the couch, and exhibited the pallor of that mask-like face, which covered such tenuous threads of life. Augustine, who had come on guard when the fever died away, sat in the armchair before those flames, trying to watch, but dropping off into the healthy sleep of youth. And out in the clear, hard, shivering Southern cold, the old clocks chimed the hours into the winter dark, where the old town brooded above plain and river under the morning stars. The girl dreamed—dreamed of a sweetheart under the acacias by her home, of his pinning their white flowers into her hair; and woke with a little laugh. Light was already coming through the shutter chinks, the fire was but

red embers and white ash. She gathered it stealthily together, put on fresh logs, and stole over to the couch. How white! how still! Dead? She jerked her hands up to her full breast, and a cry mounted in her throat. The eyes opened. The lips parted, as if to smile; the voice whispered: "Don't be silly!" The girl's cry changed into a little sob, and bending down she put her lips to the hand outside the quilt. It moved faintly, the lips whispered: "The emerald ring is for you, Augustine. Is it morning? Uncover Polly's cage and open his door."

A telegram had come. Her son and daughter would arrive next morning early. They waited for a moment of consciousness to tell her; but the day went by, and it did not come. She was sinking fast; her only movements were a tiny compression now and then of the lips, a half-opening of the eyes, and once a smile when the parrot spoke. The rally came at eight o'clock. *Mademoiselle* was sitting by the couch when the voice came fairly strong: "Give my love to my dear soldiers, and take them their francs out of my purse, please. Augustine, take care of Polly. I want to see if the emerald ring fits you. Take it off, please. There, you see, it does. That's very nice. Your sweetheart will like that when you have one. What do you say, *Mademoiselle?* My

son and daughter coming? All that way?" The lips smiled, tears forced their way into her eyes. "My darlings! How good of them! Oh! what a cold journey they'll have! Get my room ready, Augustine, with a good fire! What are you crying for? Remember what Polly says: 'Keep smiling!'"

She did not seem anxious as to whether she would live to see her children. Her smile moved *Mademoiselle* to whisper: "*Elle a la sourire divine.*"

"*Ah! Mademoiselle, elle pense toujours aux autres.*" And the girl's tears dropped on the emerald ring.

The long night fell—would she wake again? Both watched, ready at the faintest movement to administer oxygen and brandy. She was still breathing when at six o'clock they heard the express come in and presently the carriage stop before the house. *Mademoiselle* stole down to let them in.

Still in their travelling coats, her son and daughter knelt down beside the couch, watching in the dim candle-light for a sign and cherishing her cold hands. Daylight came; they put the shutters back and blew out the candles. Augustine, huddled in the far corner, cried gently to herself. *Mademoiselle* had withdrawn. The two

still knelt, tears running down their cheeks. The least twitching of just-opened lips showed that she breathed. A tiny sigh escaped; her eyelids fluttered. The son, leaning forward, said:

"Sweetheart, we're here."

The eyes opened then; something more than a simple human spirit seemed to look through—the lips parted. They bent to catch the sound.

"My darlings—don't cry; smile!" The eyes closed. A smile, so touching that it rent the heart, flickered and went out. Breath had ceased to pass the lips.

In the silence the French girl's sobbing rose; the parrot stirred in his still-covered cage. And the son and daughter knelt, pressing their faces against the couch.

1917.

XIX

DEFEAT

SHE had been standing there on the pavement a quarter of an hour or so after her shilling's worth of concert. Women of her profession are not supposed to have redeeming points, especially when—like May Belinski, as she now preferred to dub herself—they are German; but this woman certainly had music in her soul. She often gave herself these "music baths" when the Promenade Concerts were on, and had just spent half her total wealth in listening to some Mozart and a Beethoven symphony.

She was feeling almost elated, full of divine sound, and of the summer moonlight that was filling the whole dark town. Women "of a certain type" have, at all events, emotions—and what a comfort that is, even to themselves! To stand just there had become rather a habit of hers. One could seem to be waiting for somebody coming out of the concert, not yet over—which, of course, was precisely what she *was* doing. One need not for ever be stealthily glancing and per-

petually moving on in that peculiar way, which, while it satisfied the police and Mrs. Grundy, must not quite deceive others as to her business in life. She had only "been at it" long enough to have acquired a nervous dread of almost everything—not long enough to have passed through that dread to callousness. Some women take so much longer than others. And even for a woman "of a certain type" her position was exceptionally nerve-racking in war-time, going as she did by a false name. Indeed, in all England there could hardly be a greater pariah than was this German woman of the night.

She idled outside a book-shop humming a little, pretending to read the titles of the books by moonlight, taking off and putting on one of her stained yellow gloves. Now and again she would move up as far as the posters outside the hall, scrutinising them as if interested in the future, then stroll back again. In her worn and discreet dark dress, and her small hat, she had nothing about her to rouse suspicion, unless it were the trail of violet powder she left on the moonlight.

For the moonlight this evening was almost solid, seeming with its cool still vibration to replace the very air, in it the war-time precautions against light seemed fantastic, like shading can-

dles in a room still full of daylight. What lights there were had the effect of strokes and stipples of dim colour laid by a painter's brush on a background of ghostly whitish-blue. The dreamlike quality of the town was perhaps enhanced for her eyes by the veil she was wearing—in daytime no longer white. As the music died out of her, elation also ebbed. Somebody had passed her, speaking German, and she was overwhelmed by a rush of nostalgia. On this moonlit night by the banks of the Rhine—whence she came—the orchards would be heavy with apples; there would be murmurs and sweet scents; the old castle would stand out clear, high over the woods and the chalky-white river. There would be singing far away, and the churning of a distant steamer's screw; and perhaps on the water a log raft still drifting down in the blue light. There would be German voices talking. And suddenly tears oozed up in her eyes, and crept down through the powder on her cheeks. She raised her veil and dabbed at her face with a little, not-too-clean handkerchief, screwed up in her yellow-gloved hand. But the more she dabbed the more those treacherous tears ran. Then she became aware that a tall young man in khaki was also standing before the shop-window, not looking at the titles of the books, but eyeing her askance. His face was fresh and open, with a

sort of kindly eagerness in his blue eyes. Mechanically she drooped her wet lashes, raised them obliquely, drooped them again, and uttered a little sob. . . .

This young man, captain in a certain regiment, and discharged from hospital at six o'clock that evening, had entered Queen's Hall at half-past seven. Still rather brittle and sore from his wound, he had treated himself to a seat in the grand circle, and there had sat, very still and dreamy, the whole concert through. It had been like eating after a long fast—something of the sensation Polar explorers must experience when they return to their first full meal. For he was of the New Army, and before the war had actually believed in music, art, and all that sort of thing. With a month's leave before him, he could afford to feel that life was extraordinarily joyful, his own experiences particularly wonderful; and, coming out into the moonlight, he had taken what can only be described as a great gulp of it, for he was a young man with a sense of beauty. When one has been long in the trenches, lain out wounded in a shell-hole twenty-four hours, and spent three months in hospital, beauty has such an edge of novelty, such a sharp sweetness, that it almost gives pain. And London at night is very beautiful. He strolled slowly towards the Circus, still

drawing the moonlight deep into his lungs, his cap tilted up a little on his forehead in that moment of unmilitary abandonment; and whether he stopped before the book-shop window because the girl's figure was in some sort a part of beauty, or because he saw that she was crying, he could not have made clear to any one.

Then something—perhaps the scent of powder, perhaps the yellow glove, or the oblique flutter of the eyelids—told him that he was making what he would have called "a blooming error," unless he wished for company, which had not been in his thoughts. But her sob affected him, and he said:

"What's the matter?"

Again her eyelids fluttered sideways, and she stammered:

"Not'ing. The beautiful evening—that's why!"

That a woman of what he now clearly saw to be "a certain type" should perceive what he himself had just been perceiving, struck him forcibly, and he said:

"Cheer up."

She looked up again swiftly. "All right! But you are not lonelee like me."

For one of that sort, she looked somehow honest; her tear-streaked face was rather pretty, and he murmured:

"Well, let's walk a bit and talk it over."

They turned the corner, and walked east, along streets empty and beautiful, with their dulled orange-glowing lamps, and here and there the glint of some blue or violet light. He found it queer and rather exciting—for an adventure of just this kind he had never had. And he said doubtfully:

"How did you get into this? Isn't it an awfully hopeless life?"

"Ye-es, it ees——" her voice had a queer soft emphasis. "You are limping—haf you been wounded?"

"Just out of hospital."

"The horrible war—all the misery is because of the war. When will it end?"

He looked at her, and said:

"I say—what nationality are you?"

"Rooshian."

"Really! I never met a Russian girl."

He was conscious that she looked at him, then very quickly down. And he said suddenly:

"Is it as bad as they make out?"

She slipped her yellow-gloved hand through his arm.

"Not when I haf any one as nice as you; I never haf yet, though;" she smiled—and her

smile was like her speech, slow, confiding. "You stopped because I was sad, others stop because I am gay. I am not fond of men at all. When you know, you are not fond of them."

"Well! You hardly know them at their best, do you? You should see them at the front. By George! they're simply splendid—officers and men, every blessed soul. There's never been anything like it—just one long bit of jolly fine self-sacrifice; it's perfectly amazing."

Turning her blue-grey eyes on him, she answered:

"I expect you are not the last at that. You see in them what you haf in yourself, I think."

"Oh! not a bit—you're quite out. I assure you when we made the attack where I got wounded there wasn't a single man in my regiment who wasn't an absolute hero. The way they went in—never thinking of themselves—it was simply superb!"

Her teeth came down on her lower lip, and she answered in a queer voice: "It is the same too, perhaps, with—the enemy."

"Oh, yes, I know that."

"Ah! You are not a mean man. How I hate mean men!"

"Oh! they're not mean really—they simply don't understand."

"Oh! you are a baby—a good baby, aren't you?"

He did not quite like being called a baby, and frowned; but was at once touched by the disconcertion in her powdered face. How quickly she was scared!

She said clingingly:

"But I li-ike you for it. It is so good to find a ni-ice man."

This was worse, and he said abruptly:

"About being lonely? Haven't you any Russian friends?"

"Rooshian! No! The town is so beeg! Haf you been in the concert?"

"Yes."

"I, too—I love music."

"I suppose all Russians do."

She looked up at his face again, and seemed to struggle to keep silent; then she said quietly:

"I go there always when I haf the money."

"What! Are you so on the rocks?"

"Well, I haf just one shilling now." And she laughed.

The sound of that little laugh upset him—she had a way of making him feel sorry for her every time she spoke.

They had come by now to a narrow square, east of Gower Street.

"This is where I lif," she said. "Come in!"

He had one long moment of violent hesitation, then yielded to the soft tugging of her hand, and followed. The passage-hall was dimly lighted, and they went upstairs into a front room, where the curtains were drawn, and the gas turned very low. Opposite the window were other curtains dividing off the rest of the apartment. As soon as the door was shut she put up her face and kissed him—evidently formula. What a room! Its green and beetroot colouring and the prevalence of cheap plush disagreeably affected him. Everything in it had that callous look of rooms which seem to be saying to their occupants: "You're here to-day and you'll be gone to-morrow." Everything except one little plant, in a common pot, of maidenhair fern, fresh and green, looking as if it had been watered within the hour; in this room it had just the same unexpected touchingness that peeped out of the girl's matter-of-fact cynicism.

Taking off her hat, she went towards the gas, but he said quickly:

"No, don't turn it up; let's have the window open, and the moonlight in." He had a sudden dread of seeing anything plainly—it was stuffy, too, and pulling the curtains apart, he threw up the window. The girl had come obediently from

the hearth, and sat down opposite him, leaning her arm on the window-sill and her chin on her hand. The moonlight caught her cheek where she had just renewed the powder, and her fair crinkly hair; it caught the plush of the furniture, and his own khaki, giving them all a touch of unreality.

"What's your name?" he said.

"May. Well, I call myself that. It's no good askin' yours."

"You're a distrustful little soul, aren't you?"

"I haf reason to be, don't you think?"

"Yes, I suppose you're bound to think us all brutes?"

"Well, I haf a lot of reasons to be afraid all my time. I am dreadfully nervous now; I am not trusting anybody. I suppose you haf been killing lots of Germans?"

He laughed.

"We never know, unless it happens to be hand to hand. I haven't come in for that yet."

"But you would be very glad if you had killed some?"

"Glad? I don't think so. We're all in the same boat so far as that's concerned. We're not glad to kill each other. We do our job—that's all."

"Oh! it is frightful. I expect I haf my broders killed."

"Don't you get any news ever?"

"News! No indeed, no news of anybody in my country. I might not haf a country; all that I ever knew is gone—fader, moder, sisters, broders, all—never any more I shall see them, I suppose, now. The war it breaks and breaks—it breaks hearts." Her little teeth fastened again on her lower lip in that sort of pretty snarl. "Do you know what I was thinkin' when you came up? I was thinkin' of my native town, and the river there in the moonlight. If I could see it again, I would be glad. Were you ever homeseeck?"

"Yes, I have been—in the trenches; but one's ashamed, with all the others."

"Ah! ye-es!" It came from her with a hiss. "Ye-es! You are all comrades there. What is it like for me here, do you think, where everybody hates and despises me, and would catch me, and put me in prison, perhaps?"

He could see her breast heaving with a quick breathing painful to listen to. He leaned forward, patting her knee, and murmuring: "So sorry."

She said in a smothered voice:

"You are the first who has been kind to me for so long! I will tell you the truth—I am not Rooshian at all—I am German."

Hearing that half-choked confession, his

thought was: 'Does she really think we fight against women?' And he said:

"My dear girl, who cares?"

Her eyes seemed to search right into him. She said slowly:

"Another man said that to me. But he was thinkin' of other things. You are a veree ni-ice boy. I am so glad I met you. You see the good in people, don't you? That is the first thing in the world—because there is really not much good in people, you know."

He said, smiling:

"You're a dreadful little cynic!" Then thought: 'Well—of course!'

"Cyneec? How long do you think I would live if I was not a cyneec? I should drown myself tomorrow. Perhaps there are good people, but, you see, I don't know them."

"I know lots."

She leaned forward eagerly.

"Well now—see, ni-ice boy—you haf never been in a hole, haf you?"

"I suppose not a real hole."

"No, I should think not, with your face. Well, suppose I am still a good girl, as I was once, you know, and you took me to some of your good people, and said: 'Here is a little German girl that has no work, and no money, and no friends.'

Your good people they will say: 'Oh! how sad! A German girl!' and they will go and wash their hands."

Silence fell on him. He saw his mother, his sisters, others—good people, he would swear! And yet——! He heard their voices, frank and clear; and they seemed to be talking of the Germans. If only she were not German as well!

"You see!" he heard her say, and could only mutter:

"I'm sure there *are* people."

"No. They would not take a German, even if she was good. Besides, I don't want to be good any more—I am not a humbug—I have learned to be bad. Aren't you going to kees me, ni-ice boy?"

She put her face close to his. Her eyes troubled him, but he drew back. He thought she would be offended or persistent, but she was neither; just looked at him fixedly with a curious inquiring stare; and he leaned against the window, deeply disturbed. It was as if all clear and simple enthusiasm had been suddenly knocked endways; as if a certain splendour of life that he had felt and seen of late had been dipped in cloud. Out there at the front, over here in hospital, life had been seeming so—as it were—heroic; and yet it held such mean and murky depths as well! The voices of his men,

whom he had come to love like brothers, crude burring voices, cheery in trouble, making nothing of it; the voices of doctors and nurses, patient, quiet, reassuring voices; even his own voice, infected by it all, kept sounding in his ears. All wonderful somehow, and simple; and nothing mean about it anywhere! And now so suddenly to have lighted upon this, and all that was behind it—this scared girl, this base, dark, thoughtless use of her! And the thought came to him: 'I suppose my fellows wouldn't think twice about taking her on! Why, I'm not even certain of myself, if she insists!' And he turned his face and stared out at the moonlight. He heard her voice:

"Eesn't it light? No air-raid to-night. When the Zepps burned—what a horrible death! And all the people cheered—it is natural. Do you hate us veree much?"

He turned round and said sharply:

"Hate? I don't know."

"I don't hate even the English—I despise them. I despise my people too—perhaps more, because they began this war. Oh, yes! I know that. I despise all the peoples. Why haf they made the world so miserable—why haf they killed all our lives—hundreds and thousands and millions of lives—all for not'ing. They haf made a bad world—everybody hating, and looking for

the worst everywhere. They haf made me bad, I know. I believe no more in anything. What is there to believe in? Is there a God? No! Once I was teaching little English children their prayers —isn't that funnee? I was reading to them about Christ and love. I believed all those things. Now I believe not'ing at all—no one who is not a fool or a liar can believe. I would like to work in a hospital; I would like to go and help poor boys like you. Because I am a German they would throw me out a hundred times, even if I was good. It is the same in Germany and France and Russia—everywhere. But do you think I will believe in love and Christ and a God and all that?—not I! I think we are animals—that's all! Oh! yes—you fancy it is because my life has spoiled me. It is not that at all—that's not the worst thing in life. These men are not ni-ice, like you, but it's their nature, and," she laughed, "they help me to live, which is something for me, anyway. No, it is the men who think themselves great and good, and make the war with their talk and their hate, killing us all—killing all the boys like you, and keeping poor people in prison, and telling us to go on hating; and all those dreadful cold-blood creatures who write in the papers—the same in my country, just the same; it is because of all them that I think we are only animals."

He got up, acutely miserable. He could see her following him with her eyes, and knew she was afraid she had driven him away. She said coaxingly: "Don't mind me talking, ni-ice boy. I don't know any one to talk to. If you don't like it, I can be quiet as a mouse."

He muttered:

"Oh! go on, talk away. I'm not obliged to believe you, and I don't."

She was on her feet now, leaning against the wall; her dark dress and white face just touched by the slanting moonlight; and her voice came again, slow and soft and bitter:

"Well, look here, ni-ice boy, what sort of a world is it, where millions are being tortured—horribly tortured, for no fault of theirs at all? A beautiful world, isn't it? 'Umbug! silly rot, as you boys call it. You say it is all 'Comrade!' and braveness out there at the front, and people don't think of themselves. Well, I don't think of myself veree much. What does it matter—I am lost now, anyway; but I think of my people at home, how they suffer and grieve. I think of all the poor people there and here who lose those they love, and all the poor prisoners. Am I not to think of them? And if I do, how am I to believe it a beautiful world, ni-ice boy?"

He stood very still, biting his lips.

"Look here! We haf one life each, and soon it is over. Well, I think that is lucky."

He said resentfully:

"No! there's more than that."

"Ah!" she went on softly, "you think the war is fought for the future; you are giving your lives for a better world, aren't you?"

"We must fight till we win," he said between his teeth.

"Till you win. My people think that, too. All the peoples think that if they win the world will be better. But it will not, you know, it will be much worse, anyway."

He turned away from her and caught up his cap; but her voice followed him.

"I don't care which wins, I despise them all —animals—animals! Ah! Don't go, ni-ice boy —I will be quiet now."

He took some notes from his tunic pocket, put them on the table, and went up to her.

"Good-night."

She said plaintively:

"Are you really going? Don't you like me enough?"

"Yes, I like you."

"It is because I am German, then?"

"No."

"Then why won't you stay?"

He wanted to answer: 'Because you upset me so;' but he just shrugged his shoulders.

"Won't you kees me once?"

He bent, and put his lips to her forehead; but as he took them away she threw her head back, pressed her mouth to his and clung to him.

He sat down suddenly, and said:

"Don't! I don't want to feel a brute."

She laughed. "You are a funny boy, but you are veree good. Talk to me a little, then. No one talks to me. I would much rather talk, anyway. Tell me, haf you seen many German prisoners?"

He sighed—from relief, or was it from regret?

"A good many."

"Any from the Rhine?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Were they very sad?"

"Some were—some were quite glad to be taken."

"Did you ever see the Rhine? Isn't it beautiful? It will be wonderful to-night. The moonlight will be the same here as there; in Rooshia too, and France, everywhere; and the trees will look the same as here, and people will meet under them and make love just as here. Oh! isn't it stupid, the war?—as if it was not good to be alive."

He wanted to say: 'You can't tell how good it

is to be alive till you're facing death, because you don't live till then. And when a whole lot of you feel like that—and are ready to give their lives for each other, it's worth all the rest of life put together.' But he couldn't get it out to this girl who believed in nothing.

"How were you wounded, ni-ice boy?"

"Attacking across open ground—four machine-gun bullets got me at one go off."

"Weren't you veree frightened when they ordered you to attack?" No, he had not been frightened just then! And he shook his head and laughed.

"It was great. We did laugh that morning. They got me much too soon, though—a swindle!"

She stared at him.

"You laughed?"

"Yes, and what do you think was the first thing I was conscious of next morning—my old colonel bending over me and giving me a squeeze of lemon. If you knew my colonel, you'd still believe in things. There *is* something, you know, behind all this evil. After all, you can only die once, and if it's for your country all the better."

Her face, with intent eyes just touched with dark, had in the moonlight a most strange, otherworld look. Her lips moved:

"No, I believe in nothing. My heart is dead."

"You think so, but it isn't, you know, or you wouldn't have been crying when I met you."

"If it were not dead, do you think I could live my life—walking the streets every night, pretending to like strange men—never hearing a kind word—never talking, for fear I will be known for a German. Soon I shall take to drinking, then I shall be '*kaput*' very quick. You see, I am practical; I see things clear. To-night I am a little emotional; the moon is funny, you know. But I live for myself only now. I don't care for anything or anybody."

"All the same, just now you were pitying your people, and prisoners, and that."

"Yes, because they suffer. Those who suffer are like me—I pity myself, that's all; I am different from your Englishwomen. I see what I am doing; I do not let my mind become a turnip just because I am no longer moral."

"Nor your heart either."

"Ni-ice boy, you are veree obstinate. But all that about love is 'umbug. We love ourselves, nothing more."

Again, at that intense soft bitterness in her voice, he felt stifled, and got up, leaning on the window sill. The air out there was free from the smell of dust and stale perfume. He felt her

fingers slip between his own, and stay unmoving. If she was so hard and cynical, why should he pity her? Yet he did. The touch of that hand within his own roused his protective instinct. She had poured out her heart to him—a perfect stranger! He pressed it a little, and felt her fingers crisp in answer. Poor little devil! This was a friendlier moment than she had known for years! And after all, fellow-feeling was bigger than principalities and powers! Fellow-feeling was all-pervading as this moonlight, which she had said would be the same in Germany—as this white ghostly glamour wrapping the trees making the orange lamps so quaint and decoratively useless out in the narrow square, where emptiness and silence reigned. He looked round into her face—in spite of kohl and powder, and the red salve on her lips, it had a queer, unholy, touching beauty. And he had suddenly the strangest feeling, as if they stood there—the two of them—proving that kindness and human fellowship were stronger than lust, stronger than hate; proving it against meanness and brutality, and the sudden shouting of newspaper boys in some neighbouring streets, whose cries, passionately vehement, clashed into each other, and obscured the words —what was it they were calling? His head went up to listen; he felt her hand rigid within his arm

—she too was listening. The cries came nearer, hoarser, more shrill and clamorous; the empty moonlight seemed of a sudden crowded with figures, footsteps, voices, and a fierce distant cheering. "Great victory—great victory! Official! British! Severe defeat of the 'Uns! Many thousand prisoners!" So it sped by, intoxicating, filling him with a fearful joy; and leaning far out, he waved his cap and cheered like a madman; and the whole night seemed to him to flutter and vibrate and answer. Then he turned to rush down into the street, struck against something soft, and recoiled. The girl! She stood with hands clenched, her face convulsed, panting, and even in the madness of his joy he felt for her. To hear this—in the midst of enemies! All confused with the desire to do something, he stooped to take her hand; and the dusty reek of the table-cloth clung to his nostrils. She snatched away her fingers, swept up the notes he had put down, and held them out to him.

"Take them—I will not haf your English money—take them." And suddenly she tore them across twice, three times, let the bits flutter to the floor, and turned her back to him. He stood looking at her leaning against the plush-covered table which smelled of dust, her head down, a dark figure in a dark room with the moonlight sharp-

ening her outline—hardly a moment he stayed, than made for the door. . . .

When he was gone, she still stood there, her chin on her breast—she who cared for nothing, believed in nothing—with the sound in her ears of cheering, of hurrying feet, and voices; stood in the centre of a pattern made by fragments of the torn-up notes, staring out into the moonlight, seeing, not this hated room and the hated square outside, but a German orchard, and herself, a little girl, plucking apples, a big dog beside her; a hundred other pictures, too, such as the drowning see. Her heart swelled; she sank down on the floor, laid her forehead on the dusty carpet, and pressed her body to it.

She who did not care—who despised all peoples, even her own—began, mechanically, to sweep together the scattered fragments of the notes, assembling them with the dust into a little pile, as of fallen leaves, and dabbling in it with her fingers, while the tears ran down her cheeks. For her country she had torn them, her country in defeat! She, who had just one shilling in this great town of enemies, who wrung her stealthy living out of the embraces of her foes! And suddenly in the moonlight she sat up and began to sing with all her might—"*Die Wacht am Rhein.*"

1916.

XX

THE BRIGHT SIDE

A LITTLE Englishwoman, married to a German, had dwelt with him eighteen years in humble happiness and the district of Putney, where her husband worked in the finer kinds of leather. He was a harmless, busy little man with the gift for turning his hand to anything, which is bred into the peasants of the Black Forest, who on their upland farms make all the necessaries of daily life—their coarse linen from home-grown flax, their leather gear from the hides of their beasts, their clothes from the wool thereof, their furniture from the pine logs of the forest, their bread from home-grown flour milled in simple fashion and baked in the home-made ovens, their cheese from the milk of their own goats. Why he had come to England he probably did not remember—it was so long ago; but he would still know why he had married Dora, the daughter of the Putney carpenter, she being, as it were, salt of the earth: one of those Cockney women, deeply sensitive beneath a well-nigh im-

permeable mask of humour and philosophy, who quite unselfconsciously are always doing things for others. In their little grey Putney house they had dwelt those eighteen years, without perhaps ever having had time to move, though they had often had the intention of doing so for the sake of the children, of whom they had three, a boy and two girls. Mrs. Gerhardt—as I will call her, for her husband had a very German name, and there is more in a name than Shakespeare dreamed of—Mrs. Gerhardt was a little woman with large hazel eyes and dark crinkly hair in which there were already a few threads of grey when the war broke out. Her boy David, the eldest, was fourteen at that date, and her girls, Minnie and Violet, were eight and five, rather pretty children, especially the little one. Gerhardt, perhaps because he was so handy, had never risen. His firm regarded him as indispensable and paid him fair wages, but he had no "push," having the craftsman's temperament, and employing his spare time in little neat jobs for his house and his neighbours, which brought him no return. They made their way, therefore, without that provision for the future which necessitates the employment of one's time for one's own ends. But they were happy, and had no enemies; and each year saw some mild improve-

ments in their studiously clean house and tiny back garden. Mrs. Gerhardt, who was cook, seamstress, washerwoman, besides being wife and mother, was almost notorious in that street of semi-detached houses for being at the disposal of any one in sickness or trouble. She was not strong in body, for things had gone wrong when she bore her first, but her spirit had that peculiar power of seeing things as they were, and yet refusing to be dismayed, which so embarrasses Fate. She saw her husband's defects clearly, and his good qualities no less distinctly—they never quarrelled. She gauged her children's characters, too, with an admirable precision, which left, however, loopholes of wonder as to what they would become.

The outbreak of the war found them on the point of going to Margate for Bank Holiday, an almost unparalleled event; so that the importance of the world catastrophe was brought home to them with a vividness which would otherwise have been absent from folk so simple, domestic, and far-removed from that atmosphere in which the egg of war is hatched. Over the origin and merits of the struggle, beyond saying to each other several times that it was a dreadful thing, Mr. and Mrs. Gerhardt held but one little conversation, lying in their iron bed with an immortal brown eiderdown, patterned with red

wriggles, over them. They agreed that it was a cruel, wicked thing to invade "that little Belgium," and there left a matter which seemed to them a mysterious and insane perversion of all they had hitherto been accustomed to think of as life. Reading their papers—a daily and a weekly, in which they had as much implicit faith as a million other readers—they were soon duly horrified by the reports therein of "Hun" atrocities; so horrified that they would express their condemnation of the Kaiser and his militarism as freely as if they had been British subjects. It was, therefore, with an uneasy surprise that they began to find these papers talking of "the Huns at large in our midst," of "spies," and the national danger of "nourishing such vipers." They were deeply conscious of not being "vipers," and such sayings began to awaken in both their breasts a humble sense of injustice, as it were. This was more acute in the breast of little Mrs. Gerhardt, because, of course, the shafts were directed not at her but at her husband. She knew her husband so well, knew him incapable of anything but homely kindly busyness, and that he should be lumped into the category of "Huns" and "spies" and tarred with the brush of mass hatred amazed and stirred her indignation, or would have, if her Cockney temperament had allowed her to take it

very seriously. As for Gerhardt, he became extremely silent, so that it was ever more and more difficult to tell what he was feeling. The patriotism of the newspapers took a considerable time to affect the charity of the citizens of Putney, and so long as no neighbour showed signs of thinking that little Gerhardt was a monster and a spy, it was fairly easy for Mrs. Gerhardt to sleep at night, with the feeling that the remarks in the papers were not really intended for Gerhardt and herself. But she noticed that her man had given up reading them and would push them away, if, in the tiny sitting-room with the heavily-flowered walls, they happened to rest beside him. He had perhaps a closer sense of impending Fate than she. The boy, David, went to his first work, and the girls to their school, and so things dragged on through that first long war winter and spring. Mrs. Gerhardt, in the intervals of doing everything, knitted socks for "our poor cold boys in the trenches," but Gerhardt no longer sought out little jobs to do in the houses of his neighbours. Mrs. Gerhardt thought that he "fancied" they would not like it. It was early in that spring that she took a deaf aunt to live with them, the wife of her mother's brother, no blood-relation, but the poor woman had nowhere else to go; so David was put to sleep on the horsehair sofa in the sit-

ting-room because she "couldn't refuse the poor thing." And then, of an April afternoon, while she was washing the household sheets, her neighbour, Mrs. Clirehugh, a little spare woman, all eyes, cheekbones, hair and decision, came in breathless and burst out:

"Oh! Mrs. Gerhardt, 'ave you 'eard? They've sunk the *Loositania!* Has I said to Will: Isn't it horful?"

Mrs. Gerhardt, her round arms dripping soapsuds, answered: "What a dreadful thing! The poor drowning people! Dear! Oh, dear!"

"Oh! Those Huns! I'd shoot the lot, I would!"

"They *are* wicked!" Mrs. Gerhardt echoed: "That was a dreadful thing to do!"

But it was not till Gerhardt came in at five o'clock, white as a sheet, that she perceived how this catastrophe affected them.

"I have been called a German," were the first words he uttered; "Dollee, I have been called a German."

"Well, so you are, my dear," said Mrs. Gerhardt.

"You do not see," he answered, with a heat and agitation which surprised her. "I tell you this *Lusitania* will finish our business. They will have me. They will take me away from you all. Already the papers have: 'Intern all the Huns.'"

He sat down at the kitchen table and buried his face in hands still grimy from his leather work. Mrs. Gerhardt stood beside him, her eyes unnaturally big.

"But, Max," she said, "what has it to do with you? You couldn't help it, Max!"

Gerhardt looked up, his white face, broad in the brow and tapering to a thin chin, seemed distraught.

"What do they care for that? Is my name Max Gerhardt? What do they care if I hate the war? I am a German. That's enough. You will see."

"Oh!" murmured Mrs. Gerhardt, "they won't be so unjust."

Gerhardt reached up and caught her chin in his hand, and for a moment those two pairs of eyes gazed, straining, into each other. Then he said:

"I don't want to be taken, Dollee. What shall I do away from you and the children? I don't want to be taken, Dollee."

Mrs. Gerhardt, with a feeling of terror and a cheerful smile, answered:

"You mustn't go fancyin' things, Max. I'll make you a nice cup of tea. Cheer up, old man! Look on the bright side!"

But Gerhardt lapsed into the silence which of late she had begun to dread.

That night some shop windows were broken,

some German names effaced. The Gerhardts had no shop, no name painted up, and they escaped. In Press and Parliament the cry against "the Huns in our midst" rose with a fresh fury; but, for the Gerhardts, the face of Fate was withdrawn. Gerhardt went to his work as usual, and their laborious and quiet existence remained undisturbed; nor could Mrs. Gerhardt tell whether her "man's" ever-deepening silence was due to his "fancying things" or to the demeanour of his neighbours and fellow workmen. One would have said that he, like the derelict aunt, was deaf, so difficult to converse with had he become. His length of sojourn in England and his value to his employers, for he had real skill, had saved him for the time being; but, behind the screen, Fate twitched her grinning chaps.

Not till the howl which followed some air raids in 1916 did they take off Gerhardt, with a variety of other elderly men, whose crime it was to have been born in Germany. They did it suddenly, and perhaps it was as well, for a prolonged sight of his silent misery must have upset his family till they would have been unable to look on that bright side of things which Mrs. Gerhardt had, as it were, always up her sleeve. When, in charge of a big and sympathetic constable, he was gone, taking all she could hurriedly get together for him,

she hastened to the police station. They were friendly to her there—she must cheer up, 'e'd be all right, she needn't worry. Ah! she could go down to the 'Ome Office, if she liked, and see what could be done. But they 'eld out no 'ope! Mrs. Gerhardt waited till the morrow, having the little Violet in bed with her, and crying quietly into her pillow; then, putting on her Sunday best, she went down to a building in Whitehall, larger than any she had ever entered. Two hours she waited, sitting unobtrusive, with big, anxious eyes, and a line between her brows. At intervals of half an hour she would get up and ask the messenger cheerfully: "I 'ope they haven't forgotten me, sir. Perhaps you'd see to it." And because she was cheerful the messenger took her under his protection, and answered: "All right, Missis. They're very busy, but *I'll* wangle you in some'ow."

When at length she was "wangled" into the presence of a grave gentleman in eye-glasses, realisation of the utter importance of this moment overcame her so that she could not speak. 'Oh! dear,' she thought, while her heart fluttered like a bird—'he'll never understand; I'll never be able to make him.' She saw her husband buried under the dead leaves of despair; she saw her children getting too little food, the deaf aunt, now

bedridden, neglected in the new pressure of work which must fall on the only breadwinner left. And choking a little, she said:

"I'm sure I'm very sorry to take up your time, sir; but my 'usband's been taken to the Palace; and we've been married over twenty years, and he's been in England twenty-five; and he's a very good man and a good workman; and I thought perhaps they didn't understand that; and we've got three children and a relation that's bedridden. And of course, we understand that the Germans have been very wicked; Gerhardt always said that himself. And it isn't as if he was a spy; so I thought if you could do something for us, sir, I being English myself."

The gentleman, looking past her at the wall, answered wearily:

"Gerhardt—I'll look into it. We have to do very hard things, Mrs. Gerhardt."

Little Mrs. Gerhardt, with big eyes almost starting out of her head, for she was no fool, and perceived that this was the end, said eagerly:

"Of course I know that there's a big outcry, and the papers are askin' for it; but the people in our street don't mind 'im, sir. He's always done little things for them; so I thought perhaps you might make an exception in his case."

She noticed that the gentleman's lips tightened

at the word outcry, and that he was looking at her now.

"His case was before the Committee, no doubt; but I'll inquire. Good-morning."

Mrs. Gerhardt, accustomed to not being troublesome, rose; a tear rolled down her cheek and was arrested by her smile.

"Thank you, sir, I'm sure. Good-morning, sir."

And she went out. Meeting the messenger in the corridor, and hearing his: "Well, Missis?" she answered: "I don't know. I must look on the bright side. Good-bye, and thank you for your trouble." And she turned away feeling as if she had been beaten all over.

The bright side on which she looked did not include the return to her of little Gerhardt, who was duly detained for the safety of the country. Obedient to economy, and with a dim sense that her favourite papers were in some way responsible for this, she ceased to take them in, and took in sewing instead. It had become necessary to do so, for the allowance she received from the Government was about a quarter of Gerhardt's weekly earnings. In spite of its inadequacy it was something, and she felt she must be grateful. But, curiously enough, she could not forget that she was English, and it seemed strange to her that, in

addition to the grief caused by separation from her husband, from whom she had never been parted, not even for a night, she should now be compelled to work twice as hard and eat half as much because that husband had paid her country the compliment of preferring it to his own. But, after all, many other people had much worse trouble to grieve over, so she looked on the bright side of all this, especially on those days once a week when alone, or accompanied by the little Violet, she visited that Palace where she had read in her favourite journals to her great comfort that her husband was treated like a prince. Since he had no money he was in what they called "the battalion," and their meetings were held in the bazaar, where things that "the princes" made were exposed for sale. Here Mr. and Mrs. Gerhardt would stand in front of some doll, some blotting-book, calendar, or walking-stick, which had been fashioned by one of "the princes." There they would hold each other's hands and try to imagine themselves unsurrounded by other men and wives, while the little Violet would stray and return to embrace her father's leg spasmodically. Standing there, Mrs. Gerhardt would look on the bright side, and explain to Gerhardt how well everything was going, and he mustn't fret about them, and how kind the police were,

and how auntie asked after him, and Minnie would get a prize; and how he oughtn't to mope but eat his food, and look on the bright side. And Gerhardt would smile the smile which went into her heart just like a sword, and say:

"All right, Dollee. I'm getting on fine." Then, when the whistle blew and he had kissed little Violet, they would be quite silent, looking at each other. And she would say in a voice so matter-of-fact that it could have deceived no one:

"Well, I must go now. Good-bye, old man."

And he would say:

"Good-bye, Dollee. Kiss me."

They would kiss, and holding little Violet's hand very hard, she would hurry away in the crowd, taking care not to look back for fear she might suddenly lose sight of the bright side. But as the months went on, became a year, eighteen months, two years, and still she went weekly to see her "prince" in his Palace, that visit became for her the hardest experience of all her hard week's doings. For she was a realist, as well as a heroine, and she could see the lines of despair not only in her man's heart, but in his face. For a long time he had not said: "I'm getting on fine, Dollee." His face had a beaten look, his figure had wasted, he complained of his head.

"It's so noisy," he would say constantly; "oh!

it's so noisy, never a quiet moment—never alone —never—never—never. And not enough to eat; it's all reduced now, Dollee."

She learned to smuggle food into his hands, but it was very little, for they had not enough at home either, with the price of living ever going up and her depleted income ever stationary. They had—her "man" told her—made a fuss in the papers about their being fed like turkey-cocks, while the "Huns" were sinking the ships. Gerhardt, always a spare little man, had lost eighteen pounds. She, naturally well-covered, was getting thin herself, but that she did not notice, too busy all day long, and too occupied in thinking of her "man." To watch him week by week, more hopeless as the months dragged on, was an acute torture, to disguise which was torture even more acute. She had long seen that there *was* no bright side, but if she admitted that she knew she would go down; so she did not. And she carefully kept from Gerhardt such matters as David's overgrowing his strength because she could not feed him properly; the completely bedridden nature of auntie; and worse than these, the growing coldness and unkindness of her neighbours. Perhaps they did not mean to be unkind, perhaps they did, for it was not in their nature to withstand the pressure of mass senti-

ment, the continual personal discomfort of having to stand in queues, the fear of air raids, the cumulative indignation caused by stories of atrocities, true and untrue. In spite of her record of kindliness towards them she became tarred with the brush at last, for her nerves had given way once or twice and she had said it was a shame to keep her "man" like that gettin' iller and iller, who had never done a thing. Even her reasonableness—and she was very reasonable—succumbed to the strain of that weekly sight of him, till she could no longer allow for the difficulties which Mrs. Clirehugh assured her the Government had to deal with. Then one day she used the words "fair play," and at once it became current that she had "German sympathies." From that time on she was somewhat doomed. Those who had received kindnesses from her were foremost in showing her coldness, being wounded in their self-esteem. To have received little benefits, such as being nursed when they were sick, from one who had "German sympathies" was too much for the pride which is in every human being, however humble an inhabitant of Putney. Mrs. Gerhardt's Cockney spirit could support this for herself, but she could not bear it for her children. David came home with a black eye and would not say why he had got it. Minnie missed her

prize at school, though she had clearly won it. That was just after the last German offensive began; but Mrs. Gerhardt refused to see that this was any reason. Little Violet twice put the heart-rending question to her: "Aren't I English, mummy?"

She was answered: "Yes, my dear, of course."

But the child obviously remained unconvinced in her troubled mind.

And then they took David for the British Army. It was that which so upset the apple-cart in Mrs. Gerhardt that she broke out to her last friend, Mrs. Clirehugh:

"I do think it's hard, Eliza. They take his father and keep him there for a dangerous Hun, year after year like that; and then they take his boy for the army to fight against him. And how I'm to get on without him I don't know."

Little Mrs. Clirehugh, who was Scotch, with a Gloucestershire accent, replied:

"Well, we've got to beat them. They're such a wicked lot. I daresay it's 'ard on you, but we've got to beat them."

"But *we* never did nothing," cried Mrs. Gerhardt; "it isn't us that's wicked. We never wanted the war; it's nothing but ruin to him. They did ought to let me have my man or my boy, one or the other."

"You should 'ave some feeling for the Government, Dora; they 'ave to do 'ard things."

Mrs. Gerhardt, with a quivering face, had looked at her friend.

"I have," she said at last in a tone which implanted in Mrs. Clirehugh's heart the feeling that Dora was "bitter."

She could not forget it; and she would flaunt her head at any mention of her former friend. It was a blow to Mrs. Gerhardt, who had now no friends, except the deaf and bedridden aunt to whom all things were the same, war or no war, Germans or no Germans, so long as she was fed.

About then it was that the tide turned, and the Germans began to know defeat. Even Mrs. Gerhardt, who read the papers no longer, learned it daily, and her heart relaxed; that bright side began to reappear a little. She felt they could not feel so hardly toward her "man" now as when they were all in fear; and, perhaps, the war would be over before her boy went out. But Gerhardt puzzled her. He did not brighten up. The iron seemed to have entered his soul too deeply. And one day, in the bazaar, passing an open doorway, Mrs. Gerhardt had a glimpse of why. There, stretching before her astonished eyes, was a great, as it were, encampment of brown blankets, slung and looped up anyhow, dividing from each other

countless sordid beds, which were almost touching, and a whiff of huddled humanity came out to her keen nostrils, and a hum of sound to her ears. So that was where her "man" had dwelt these thirty months, in that dirty, crowded, noisy place with dirty-looking men such as those she could see lying on the beds, or crouching by the side of them over their work. He had kept neat somehow, at least on the days when she came to see him—but *that* was where he lived! Alone again (for she no longer brought the little Violet to see her German father), she grieved all the way home. Whatever happened to him now, even if she got him back, she knew he would never quite get over it.

And then came the morning when she came out of her door like the other inhabitants of Putney, at sound of the maroons, thinking it was an air raid; and, catching the smile on the toothless mouth of one of her old neighbours, hearing the cheers of the boys in the school round the corner, knew that it was Peace. Her heart overflowed then, and, withdrawing hastily, she sat down on a shiny chair in her empty parlour. Her face crumpled suddenly, the tears came welling forth, and she cried, alone in the little cold room. She cried from relief and utter thankfulness. It was over—over at last! The long waiting—the long misery

—the yearning for her "man"—the grieving for all those poor boys in the mud and the dreadful shell-holes and the fighting, the growing terror of anxiety for her own boy—over, all over! Now they would let Max out, now David would come back from the army; and people would not be unkind and spiteful to her and the children any more!

For all she was a Cockney, hers was a simple soul, associating peace with good-will. Drying her tears, she stood up, and in the little cheap mirror above the empty grate looked at her face. It was lined, and she was grey; for more than two years her "man" had not seen her without her hat. Whatever would he say? And she rubbed and rubbed her cheeks, trying to smooth them out. Then her conscience smote her, and she ran upstairs to the back bedroom, where the deaf aunt lay. Taking up the amateur ear-trumpet which Gerhardt himself had made for "auntie," before he was taken away, she bawled into it:

"Peace, Auntie; it's Peace! Think of that. It's Peace!"

"What's that?" answered the deaf woman.

"It's Peace, Auntie, Peace!"

The deaf lady roused herself a little, and some meaning came into the lack-lustre black eyes of her long, leathery face. "You don't say," she said

in her wooden voice. "I'm so hungry, Dolly; isn't it time for my dinner?"

"I was just goin' to get it, dearie," replied Mrs. Gerhardt, and hurried back downstairs with her brain teeming, to make the deaf woman's bowl of bread, pepper, salt and onions.

All that day and the next and the next she saw the bright side of things with almost dazzling clearness, waiting to visit her "prince" in his Palace. She found him in a strange and pitiful state of nerves. The news had produced too intense and varied emotions among those crowded thousands of men buried away from normal life so long. She spent all her hour and a half trying desperately to make him see the bright side, but he was too full of fears and doubts, and she went away smiling, but utterly exhausted. Slowly in the weeks which followed she learned that nothing was changed. In the fond hope that Gerhardt might be home now any day she was taking care that his slippers and some clothes of David's were ready for him, and the hip bath handy for him to have a lovely hot wash. She had even bought a bottle of beer and some of his favourite pickle, saving the price out of her own food, and was taking in the paper again, letting bygones be bygones. But he did not come. And soon the paper informed her that the English prisoners were re-

turning—many in wretched state, poor things, so that her heart bled for them, and made her fiercely angry with the cruel men who had treated them so; but it informed her too, that if the paper had its way no "Huns" would be tolerated in this country for the future. "Send them all back!" were the words it used. She did not realise at first that this applied to Gerhardt; but when she did she dropped the journal as if it had been a living coal of fire. Not let him come back to his home, and family, not let him stay, after all they'd done to him, and he never did anything to them! Not let him stay, but send him out to that dreadful country, which he had almost forgotten in these thirty years; and he with an English wife and children! In this new terror of utter dislocation the bright side so slipped from her that she was obliged to go out into the back garden in the dark, where a sou'westerly wind was driving the rain. There, lifting her eyes to the evening sky, she uttered her little moan. It couldn't be true; and yet, what they said in her paper had always turned out true, like the taking of Gerhardt away, and the reduction of his food. And the face of the gentleman in the building at Whitehall came before her out of the long past, with his lips tightening, and his words: "We have to do very hard things, Mrs. Gerhardt." Why

had they to do them? Her "man" had never done no harm to no one! A flood, bitter as sea water, surged in her, and seemed to choke her very being. Those gentlemen in the papers—why should they go on like that? Had they no hearts, no eyes to see the misery they brought to humble folk? 'I wish them nothing worse than what they've brought to him and me,' she thought wildly, 'nothing worse!'

The rain beat on her face, wetted her grey hair, cooled her eyeballs. 'I mustn't be spiteful,' she thought; and bending down in the dark, she touched the glass of the tiny conservatory up against the warm kitchen wall, heated by the cunning hot-water pipe that her "man" had put there in his old handy days. Under it were one monthly rose, which still had blossoms, and some straggly small chrysanthemums. She had been keeping them for the feast when he came home; but if he wasn't to come, what should she do? She raised herself. Above the wet roofs, sky-rack was passing wild and dark, but in a cleared space one or two stars shone the brighter for the blackness below. 'I must look on the bright side,' she thought, 'or I can't bear myself.' And she went in to cook the porridge for the evening meal.

The winter passed for her in the most dreadful

anxiety. "Repatriate the Huns!" That cry continued to spurt up in her paper like a terrible face seen in some recurrent nightmare; and each week that she went to visit Gerhardt brought solid confirmation to her terror. He was taking it hard, so that sometimes she was afraid that "something" was happening in him. This was the utmost she went towards defining what doctors might have diagnosed as incipient softening of the brain. He seemed to dread the prospect of being sent to his native country.

'I couldn't stick it, Dollee," he would say. "What should I do—whatever should I do? I haven't a friend. I haven't a spot to go to. I should be lost. I'm afraid, Dollee. How could you come out there, you and the children? I couldn't make a living for you. I couldn't make one for myself now."

And she would say: "Cheer up, old man. Look on the bright side. Think of the others." For, though those others were not precisely the bright side, the mental picture of their sufferings, all those poor "princes" and their families, somehow helped her to bear her own. But he shook his head:

"No, I should never see you again."

"I'd follow you," she answered. "Never fear, Max, we'd work in the fields—me and the chil-

dren. We'd get on somehow. Bear up, my dearie. It'll soon be over now. I'll stick to you, Max, never you fear. But they won't send you, they never will."

And then, like a lump of ice pressed on her breast, came the thought: 'But if they do! Auntie! My boy! My girls! However shall I manage if they do?'

Then long lists began to appear, and in great batches men were shovelled wholesale back to the country whose speech some of them had well-nigh forgotten. Gerhardt's name had not appeared yet. The lists were hung up the day after Mrs. Gerhardt's weekly visit, but she urged him if his name did appear to appeal against repatriation. It was with the greatest difficulty that she roused in him the energy to promise. "Look on the bright side, Max," she implored him. "You've got a son in the British Army; they'll never send you. They wouldn't be so cruel. Never say die, old man."

His name appeared but was taken out, and the matter hung again in awful suspense, while the evil face of the recurrent nightmare confronted Mrs. Gerhardt out of her favourite journal. She read that journal again, because so far as in her gentle spirit lay, she hated it. It was slowly killing her "man," and all her chance of future hap-

piness; she hated it, and read it every morning. To the monthly rose and straggly brown-red chrysanthemums in the tiny hothouse there had succeeded spring flowers—a few hardy January snowdrops, and one by one blue scillas, and pale daffodils called "angels' tears."

Peace tarried, but the flowers came up long before their time in their tiny hothouse against the kitchen flue. Then one wonderful day there came to Mrs. Gerhardt a strange letter, announcing that Gerhardt was coming home. He would not be sent to Germany—he was coming home! To-day, that very day—any moment he might be with her. When she received it, who had long received no letters save the weekly letters of her boy still in the army, she was spreading margarine on auntie's bread for breakfast, and, moved beyond all control, she spread it thick, wickedly, wastefully thick, then dropped the knife, sobbed, laughed, clasped her hands on her breast, and without rhyme or reason, began singing, "Hark! the herald angels sing." The girls had gone to school already, auntie in the room above could not hear her, no one heard her, nor saw her drop suddenly into the wooden chair, and, with her bare arms stretched out one on either side of the plate of bread and margarine, cry her heart out against the clean white table. Coming

home, coming home, coming home! The bright side! The white stars!

It was a quarter of an hour before she could trust herself to answer the knocking on the floor, which meant that auntie was missing her breakfast. Hastily she made the tea and went up. The woman's dim long face gleamed greedily when she saw how thick the margarine was spread; but little Mrs. Gerhardt said no word of the reason for that feast. She just watched her only friend eating it, while moisture still trickled out from her eyes on to her flushed cheeks, and the words still hummed in her brain:

> "Peace on earth and mercy mild,
> Jesus Christ a little child."

Then, still speaking no word, she ran out and put clean sheets on her and her "man's" bed. She was on wires, she could not keep still, and all the morning she polished. About noon she went out into her garden, and from under the glass plucked every flower that grew there—snowdrops, scillas, "angels' tears," quite two dozen blossoms. She brought them into the parlour and opened its window wide. The sun was shining, and fell on the flowers strewn on the table, ready to be made into the nosegay of triumphant happiness. While she stood fingering them, delicately breaking half

an inch off their stalks so that they should last the longer in water, she became conscious of some one on the pavement outside the window, and looking up saw Mrs. Clirehugh. The past, the sense of having been deserted by her friends, left her, and she called out:

"Come in, Eliza; look at my flowers!"

Mrs. Clirehugh came in; she was in black, her cheekbones higher, her hair looser, her eyes bigger. Mrs. Gerhardt saw tears starting from those eyes, wetting those high cheekbones, and cried out:

"Why, what's the matter, dear?"

Mrs. Clirehugh choked. "My baby!"

Mrs. Gerhardt dropped an "angel's tear" and went up to her.

"Whatever's happened?" she cried.

"Dead!" replied Mrs. Clirehugh. "Dead o' the influenza. 'E's to be buried to-day. I can't—I can't——" Wild choking stopped her utterance. Mrs. Gerhardt put an arm round her and drew her head on to her shoulder.

"I can't—" sobbed Mrs. Clirehugh—"find any flowers. It's seein' yours made me cry."

"There, there!" cried Mrs. Gerhardt. "Have them. I'm sure you're welcome, dearie. Have them—I'm so sorry!"

"I don't know," choked Mrs. Clirehugh; "I

'aven't deserved them." Mrs. Gerhardt gathered up the flowers.

"Take them," she said. "I couldn't think of it. Your poor little baby. Take them! There, there, he's spared a lot of trouble. You must look on the bright side, dearie."

Mrs. Clirehugh tossed up her head.

"You're an angel, that's what *you* are!" And grasping the flowers, she hurried out, a black figure passing the window in the sunlight.

Mrs. Gerhardt stood above the emptied table, thinking: 'Poor dear—I'm glad she had the flowers. It was a mercy I didn't call out that Max was coming!' And from the floor she picked up the "angel's tear" she had dropped, and set it in a glass of water, where the sunlight fell. She was still gazing at it, pale, slender, lonely in that coarse tumbler, when she heard a knock on the parlour door and went to open it. There stood her "man," with a large brown-paper parcel in his hand. He stood quite still, his head down, the face very grey. She cried out: "Max!" but the thought flashed through her: 'He knocked on the door! It's *his* door—he knocked on the door!'

"Dollee?" he said, with a sort of question in his voice.

She threw her arms round him, drew him into the room, and shutting the door, looked hard

into his face. Yes, it was his face, but in the eyes something wandered—lit up, went out, lit up.

"Dollee," he said again, and clutched her hand.

She strained him to her with a sob.

"I'm not well, Dollee," he murmured.

"No, of course not, my dearie man; but you'll soon be all right now—home again with me. Cheer up, cheer up!"

"I'm not well," he said again.

She caught the parcel out of his hand, and taking the "angel's tear" from the tumbler, fixed it in his coat.

"Here's a spring flower for you, Max; out of your own little hothouse. You're home again; home again, my dearie. Auntie's upstairs, and the girls'll be coming soon. And we'll have dinner."

"I'm not well, Dollee," he said.

Terrified by that reiteration, she drew him down on the little horsehair sofa, and sat on his knee. "You're home, Max; kiss me. There's my man!" and she rocked him to and fro against her, yearning yet fearing to look into his face and see that "something" wander there—light up, go out, light up. "Look, dearie," she said, "I've got some beer for you. You'd like a glass of beer?"

He made a motion of his lips, a sound that was

like the ghost of a smack. It terrified her, so little life was there in it.

He clutched her close, and repeated feebly:

"Yes, all right in a day or two. They let me come—I'm not well, Dollee." He touched his head.

Straining him to her, rocking him, she murmured over and over again, like a cat purring to its kitten:

"It's all right, my dearie—soon be well—soon be well! We must look on the bright side—My man!"

1919.

XXI

"CAFARD"

THE soldier, Jean Liotard, lay, face to the earth, by the bank of the River Drôme. He lay where the grass and trees ended, and between him and the shrivelled green current was much sandy foreshore, for summer was at height, and the snows had long finished melting and passing down. The burning sun had sucked up all moisture, the earth was parched, but to-day a cool breeze blew, willow and aspen leaves were fluttering and hissing as if millions of tiny kisses were being given up there; and a few swathes of white cloud were drawn, it seemed—not driven—along the blue. The soldier, Jean Liotard, had fixed his eyes on the ground, where was nothing to see but a few dry herbs. He had "*cafard*," for he was due to leave the hospital to-morrow and go up before the military authorities, for "*prolongation*." There he would answer perfunctory questions, and be told at once: *Au dépôt;* or have to lie naked before them that

some "*major*" might prod his ribs, to find out whether his heart, displaced by shellshock, had gone back sufficiently to normal position. He had received one "*prolongation,*" and so, wherever his heart now was, he felt sure he would not get another. "*Au dépôt*" was the fate before him, fixed as that river flowing down to its death in the sea. He had "*cafard*"—the little black beetle in the brain, which gnaws and eats and destroys all hope and heaven in a man. It had been working at him all last week, and now he was at a monstrous depth of evil and despair. To begin again the cursed barrack-round, the driven life, until in a month perhaps, packed like bleating sheep in the troop-train, he made that journey to the fighting line again—"*Ā la hachette—à la hachette!*"

He had stripped off his red flannel jacket, and lay with shirt opened to the waist, to get the breeze against his heart. In his brown good-looking face the hazel eyes, which in these three God-deserted years had acquired a sort of startled gloom, stared out like a dog's, rather prominent, seeing only the thoughts within him—thoughts and images swirling round in a dark whirlpool, drawing his whole being deeper and deeper. He was unconscious of all the summer hum and rustle—the cooing of the dove up in that willow tree,

the winged enamelled fairies floating past, the chirr of the cicades, that little brown lizard among the pebbles, almost within reach, seeming to listen to the beating of summer's heart, so motionless it lay; unconscious, as though in verity he were again deep in some stifling trench, with German shells whining over him, and the smell of muck and blood making fœtid the air. He was in the mood which curses God and dies; for he was devout—a Catholic, and still went to Mass. And God had betrayed the earth, and Jean Liotard. All the enormities he had seen in his two years at the front—the mouthless, mangled faces, the human ribs whence rats would steal; the frenzied, tortured horses, with leg or quarter rent away, still living; the rotted farms, the dazed and hopeless peasants; his innumerable suffering comrades; the desert of no-man's land; and all the thunder and moaning of war; and the reek and the freezing of war; and the driving—the callous perpetual driving, by some great Force which shovelled warm human hearts and bodies, warm human hopes and loves by the million into the furnace; and over all, dark sky without a break, without a gleam of blue or lift anywhere—all this enclosed him, lying in the golden heat, so that not a glimmer of life or hope could get at him. Back into it all again! Back into it, he who had been

through forty times the hell that the "*majors*" ever endured, five hundred times the hell ever glimpsed at by those *députés*, safe with their fat salaries and their gabble about victory and the lost provinces and the future of the world—the *Canaille!* Let them allow the soldiers, whose lives they spent like water—"*les camarades*" on both sides—poor devils who bled, and froze, and starved, and sweated—let them suffer these to make the peace! Ah! what a peace that would be—its first condition, all the sacred politicians and pressmen hanging in rows in every country; the mouth fighters, the pen fighters, the fighters with other men's blood! Those comfortable citizens would never rest while there was a young man with whole limbs left in France! Had he not killed enough Boches that they might leave him and his tired heart in peace? He thought of his first charge; of how queer and soft that Boche body felt when his bayonet went through; and another, and another. Ah! he had "*joliment*" done his duty that day! And something wrenched at his ribs. They were only Boches, but their wives and children, their mothers—faces questioning, faces pleading for them—pleading with whom? Ah! not with him! Who was he that had taken those lives, and others since, but a poor devil without a life himself, without the right to

breathe or move except to the orders of a Force which had no mind, which had no heart, had nothing but a blind will to go on, it knew not why. If only he survived—it was not possible—but if only he survived, and with his millions of comrades could come back and hold the reckoning! Some scare-the-crows then would waggle in the wind. The butterflies would perch on a few mouths empty at last; the flies enjoy a few silent tongues! Then slowly his fierce unreasoning rancour vanished into a mere awful pity for himself. Was a fellow never again to look at the sky, and the good soil, the fruit, the wheat, without this dreadful black cloud above him; never again make love among the trees, or saunter down a lighted boulevard, or sit before a *café;* never again attend Mass without this black dog of disgust and dread sitting on his shoulders, riding him to death? Angels of pity! Was there never to be an end? One was going mad under it—yes, mad! And the face of his mother came before him, just as he had seen her last, three years ago, when he left his home in the now invaded country to join his regiment—his mother who, with all his family, was in the power of the Boche. He had gone gaily, and she had stood like stone, her hand held over her eyes, in the sunlight, watching him while the train ran out. Usually the

thought of the cursed Boches holding in their heavy hands all that was dear to him was enough to sweep his soul to a clear, definite hate, which made all this nightmare of war seem natural and even right; but now it was not enough—he had "*cafard.*" He turned on his back. The sky above the mountains might have been black for all the joy its blue gave him. The butterflies, those drifting flakes of joy, passed unseen. He was thinking: No rest, no end, except by walking over bodies, dead, mangled bodies of poor devils like himself, poor hunted devils, who wanted nothing but never to lift a hand in combat again so long as they lived, who wanted—as he wanted—nothing but laughter and love and rest! *Quelle vie!* A carnival of leaping demonry! A dream—unutterably bad! 'And when I go back to it all,' he thought, 'I shall go all shaven and smart, and wave my hand as if I were going to a wedding, as we all do. *Vive la France!* Ah! what mockery! Can't a poor devil have a dreamless sleep!' He closed his eyes, but the sun struck hot on them through the lids, and he turned over on his face again and looked longingly at the river—they said it was deep in mid-stream; it still ran fast there! What was that down by the water? Was he really mad? And he uttered a queer laugh. There was his black dog—the black dog off his

shoulders, the black dog which rode him, yea, which had become his very self, just going to wade in! And he called out:

"*Hé! le copain!*" It was not his dog, for it stopped drinking, tucked its tail in, and cowered at the sound of his voice. Then it came from the water and sat down on its base among the stones and looked at him. A real dog. But what a guy! What a thin wretch of a little black dog! It sat and stared—a mongrel who might once have been pretty. It stared at Jean Liotard with the pathetic gaze of a dog so thin and hungry that it earnestly desires to go to men and get fed once more, but has been so kicked and beaten that it dare not. It seemed held in suspense by the equal overmastering impulses, fear and hunger. And Jean Liotard stared back. The lost, as it were despairing, look of the dog began to penetrate his brain. He held out his hand, and said: "*Viens!*" But at the sound the little dog only squirmed away a few paces, then again sat down and resumed its stare. Again Jean Liotard uttered that queer laugh. If the good God were to hold out his hand and say to him, "*Viens!*" he would do exactly as that little beast; he would not come, not he! What was he too but a starved and beaten dog—a driven wretch, kicked to hell! And again, as if experimenting with himself, he held

out his hand and said: "*Viens!*" and again the beast squirmed a little further away, and again sat down and stared. Jean Liotard lost patience. His head drooped till his forehead touched the ground. He smelt the parched herbs, and a faint sensation of comfort stole through his nerves. He lay unmoving, trying to fancy himself dead and out of it all. The hum of summer, the smell of grasses, the caress of the breeze going over! He pressed the palms of his outstretched hands on the warm soil, as one might on a woman's breast. If only it were really death, how much better than life in this butcher's shop! But death—his death, was waiting for him away over there, under the moaning shells, under the whining bullets, at the end of a steel spike—a mangled, fœtid death. Death—his death, had no sweet scent and no caress—save the kisses of rats and crows. Life and death, what were they? Nothing but the preying of creatures the one on the other—nothing but that; and love, the blind instinct which made these birds and beasts of prey. *Bon sang de bon sang!* The Christ hid his head finely nowadays! That cross up there on the mountain top, with the sun gleaming on it—they had been right to put it up where no man lived, and not even a dog roamed to be pitied! 'Fairy tales!' he thought: 'Those who drive and those who are

driven, those who eat and those who are eaten—we are all poor devils together. There is no pity, no God!' And the flies drummed their wings above him. And the sun, boring into his spine through his thin shirt, made him reach for his jacket. The little dog, still sitting on its base twenty yards away, cowered and dropped its ears when he moved; and he thought: 'Poor beast! Some one has been doing the devil's work on you not badly!' There were some biscuits in the pocket of his jacket, and he held one out. The dog shivered, and its thin pink tongue lolled out, panting with desire and fear. Jean Liotard tossed the biscuit gently about half-way. The dog cowered back a step or two, crept forward three, and again squatted. Then very gradually it crept up to the biscuit, bolted it, and regained its distance. The soldier took out another. This time he threw it five paces only in front of him. Again the little beast cowered, slunk forward, seized the biscuit, devoured it; but this time it only recoiled a pace or two, and seemed, with panting mouth and faint wagging of the tail, to beg for more. Jean Liotard held a third biscuit as far out in front of him as he could, and waited. The creature crept forward and squatted just out of reach. There it sat, with saliva dripping from its mouth; seemingly it could not make up its mind to that awful

venture. The soldier sat motionless; his outstretched hand began to tire, but he did not budge—he meant to conquer its fear. At last it snatched the biscuit. Jean Liotard instantly held out a fourth. That too was snatched, but at the fifth he was able to touch the dog. It cowered almost into the ground at touch of his fingers, and then lay, still trembling violently, while the soldier continued to stroke its head and ears. And suddenly his heart gave a twitter, the creature had licked his hand. He took out his last biscuit, broke it up, and fed the dog slowly with the bits, talking all the time; when the last crumb was gone he continued to murmur and crumple its ears softly. He had become aware of something happening within the dog—something in the nature of conversion, as if it were saying: 'My master, my new master—I worship, I love you!' The creature came gradually closer, quite close; then put up its sharp black nose and began to lick his face. Its little hot rough tongue licked and licked, and with each lick the soldier's heart relaxed, just as if the licks were being given there and something licked away. He put his arms round the thin body and hugged it, and still the creature went on feverishly licking at his face and neck and chest, as if trying to creep inside him. The sun poured down, the lizards rustled and

whisked among the pebbles; the kissing never ceased up there among the willow and aspen leaves, and every kind of flying thing went past drumming its wings. There was no change in the summer afternoon. God might not be there, but pity had come back; Jean Liotard no longer had "*cafard.*" He put the little dog gently off his lap, got up, and stretched himself. "*Voyons, mon brave, faut aller voir les copains! Tu es à moi.*" The little dog stood up on its hind legs, scratching with its forepaws at the soldier's thigh, as if trying to get at his face again; as if begging not to be left; and its tail waved feverishly, half in petition, half in rapture. The soldier caught the paws, set them down, and turned his face for home, making the noises that a man makes to his dog; and the little dog followed, close as he could get to those moving ankles, lifting his snout and panting with anxiety and love.

1917.

XXII

THE RECRUIT

EVERAL times since that fateful fourth of August he had said: "I sh'll 'ave to go."

And the farmer and his wife would look at him, he with a sort of amusement, she with a queer compassion in her heart, and one or the other would reply smiling: "That's all right, Tom, there's plenty Germans yet. Yu wait a bit."

His mother, too, who came daily from the lonely cottage in the little combe on the very edge of the big hill to work in the kitchen and farm dairy, would turn her dark, taciturn head, with still plentiful black hair, towards his face, which for all its tan was so weirdly reminiscent of a withered baby, pinkish and light-lashed with forelock and fair hair thin and rumpled, and small blue eyes; and she would mutter:

"Don't yu never fret, boy. They'll come for 'ee fast enough when they want 'ee." No one, least of all perhaps his mother, could take quite seriously that little square, short-footed man,

born when she was just seventeen. Sure of work because he was first-rate with every kind of beast, he was yet not looked on as being quite "all there." He could neither read nor write, had scarcely ever been outside the parish, and then only in a shandrydan on a club treat, and knew no more of the world than the native of a small South Sea Island. His life from school age on had been passed, year in, year out, from dawn till dark, with the cattle and their calves, the sheep, the horses and the wild moor ponies; except when hay or corn harvest, or any exceptionally exacting festival absorbed him for the moment. From shyness he never went into the bar of the inn, and so had missed the greater part of village education. He could, of course, read no papers, a map was to him but a mystic mass of marks and colours; he had never seen the sea, never a ship; no water broader than the parish streams; until the war had never met anything more like a soldier than the constable of the neighbouring village. But he had once seen a Royal Marine in uniform. What sort of creatures these Germans were to him who knows? They were cruel—he had grasped that. Something noxious, perhaps, like the adders whose backs he broke with his stick; something dangerous, like the chained dog at Shapton Farm, or the bull at Vannacombe. When

the war first broke out, and they had called the younger blacksmith (a reservist and noted village marksman) back to his regiment, the little cowman had smiled and said: "Wait till regiment gets to front, Fred'll soon shoot 'em up."

But weeks and months went by, and it was always the Germans, the Germans; Fred had clearly not yet shot them up. And now one and now another went off from the village, and two from the farm itself; and the great Fred returned slightly injured for a few weeks' rest, and, full of whisky from morning till night, made the village ring; and finally went off again in a mood of manifest reluctance. All this weighed dumbly on the mind of the little cowman, the more heavily that because of his inarticulate shyness he could never talk that weight away, nor could any one by talk relieve him, no premises of knowledge or vision being there. From sheer physical contagion he felt the grizzly menace in the air, and a sense of being left behind when others were going to meet that menace with their fists, as it were. There was something proud and sturdy in the little man, even in the look of him, for all that he was "poor old Tom," who brought a smile to the lips of all. He was passionate, too, if rubbed up the wrong way; but it needed the malevolence and ingenuity of human beings to annoy him—

with his beasts he never lost his temper, so that they had perfect confidence in him. He resembled herdsmen of the Alps, whom one may see in dumb communion with their creatures up in those high solitudes; for he too dwelt in a high solitude cut off from real fellowship with men and women by lack of knowledge, and by the supercilious pity in them. Living in such a remote world his talk—when he did say something—had ever the surprising quality attaching to the thoughts of those by whom the normal proportions of things are quite unknown. His short square figure, hatless and rarely coated in any weather, dotting from foot to foot, a bit of stick in one hand and often a straw in the mouth—he did not smoke—was familiar in the yard where he turned the handle of the separator, or in the fields and cowsheds, from daybreak to dusk, save for the hours of dinner and tea, which he ate in the farm kitchen, making sparse and surprising comments. To his peculiar whistles and calls the cattle and calves, for all their rumination and stubborn shyness, were amazingly responsive. It was a pretty sight to see them pushing against each other round him—for, after all, he was as much the source of their persistence, especially through the scanty winter months, as a mother starling to her unfledged young.

When the Government issued their request to householders to return the names of those of military age ready to serve if called on, he heard of it, and stopped munching to say in his abrupt fashion: "I'll go—fight the Germans." But the farmer did not put his name down, saying to his wife:

"Poor old Tom! 'Twidden be 'ardly fair—they'd be makin' game of 'un."

And his wife, her eyes shining with motherliness, answered: "Poor lad, he's not fit-like."

The months went on—winter passing to spring, and the slow decking of the trees and fields began with leaves and flowers, with butterflies and the songs of birds. How far the little cowman would notice such a thing as that no one could ever have said, devoid as he was of the vocabulary of beauty, but like all the world his heart must have felt warmer and lighter under his old waistcoat, and perhaps more than most hearts, for he could often be seen standing stock-still in the fields, his browning face turned to the sun.

Less and less he heard talk of Germans—dogged acceptance of the state of war having settled on that far countryside—the beggars were not beaten and killed off yet, but they would be in good time. It was unpleasant to think of them more than could be helped. Once in a way a youth

went off and "'listed," but though the parish had given more perhaps than the average, a good few of military age still clung to life as they had known it. Then some bright spirit conceived the notion that a county regiment should march through the remoter districts to rouse them up.

The cuckoo had been singing five days; the lanes and fields, the woods and the village green were as Joseph's coat, so varied and so bright the foliage, from golden oak-buds to the brilliant little lime-tree leaves, the feathery green shoots of larches, and the already darkening bunches of the sycamores. The earth was dry—no rain for a fortnight—when the cars containing the brown-clad men and a recruiting band drew up before the inn. Here were clustered the farmers, the innkeeper, the grey-haired postman; by the church gate and before the schoolyard were knots of girls and children, schoolmistress, schoolmaster, parson; and down on the lower green a group of likely youths, an old labourer or two, and apart from human beings, as was his wont, the little cowman in brown corduroys tied below the knee and an old waistcoat, the sleeves of his blue shirt dotted with pink rolled up to the elbows of his brown arms; so he stood, his brown neck and shaven-looking head quite bare, with his bit of stick wedged between his waist and the ground,

staring with all his light-lashed water-blue eyes under the thatch of his forelock.

The speeches rolled forth glib; the khaki-clad men drank their second fill that morning of coffee and cider; the little cowman stood straight and still, his head drawn back. Two figures—officers, men who had been at the front—detached themselves and came towards the group of likely youths. These wavered a little, were silent, sniggered, stood their ground—the khaki-clad figures passed among them. Hackneyed words, jests, the touch of flattery changing swiftly to chaff—all the customary performance, hollow and pathetic; and then the two figures re-emerged, their hands clenched, their eyes shifting here and there, their lips drawn back in fixed smiles. They had failed and were trying to hide it. They must not show contempt—the young slackers might yet come in when the band played.

The cars were filled again, the band struck up: "It's a long, long way to Tipperary."

And at the edge of the green, within two yards of the car's dusty passage, the little cowman stood apart and stared. His face was red. Behind him they were cheering—the parson and farmers, schoolchildren, girls, even the group of youths. He alone did not cheer, but his face grew still more red. When the dust above the road and the

distant blare of "Tipperary" had dispersed and died he walked back to the farm, dotting from one to other of his short feet. All that afternoon and evening he spoke no word; but that flush seemed to have settled in his face for good and all. He milked some cows, but forgot to bring the pails up. Two of his precious cows he left unmilked till their distressful lowing caused the farmer's wife to go down and see. There he was, standing against a gate moving his brown neck from side to side like an animal in pain, oblivious, seemingly, of everything. She spoke to him:

"What's matter, Tom?" All he could answer was:

"I'se goin', I'se goin'." She milked the cows herself.

For the next three days he could settle to nothing, leaving his jobs half done, speaking to no one save to say:

"I'se goin'; I'se got to go." Even the beasts looked at him surprised.

On the Saturday the farmer, having consulted with his wife, said quietly:

"Well, Tom, ef yu want to go, yu shall. I'll drive 'ee down Monday. Us won't du nothin' to keep yu back."

The little cowman nodded. But he was restless as ever all through that Sunday, eating nothing.

On Monday morning, arrayed in his best clothes, he got into the dog-cart. There, without good-bye to any one, not even to his beasts, he sat staring straight before him, square, and jolting up and down beside the farmer, who turned on him now and then a dubious almost anxious eye.

So they drove the eleven miles to the recruiting station. He got down, entered, the farmer with him.

"Well, my lad," they asked him, "what d'you want to join?"

"Royal Marines."

It was a shock, coming from the short square figure of such an obvious landsman. The farmer took him by the arm.

"Why, yu'm a Devon man, Tom; better take county regiment. An't they gude enough for yu?"

Shaking his head he answered: "Royal Marines."

Was it the glamour of the words or the Royal Marine he had once seen that moved him to wish to join that outlandish corps? They took him to the recruiting station for the Royal Marines.

Stretching up his short square body and blowing out his cheeks to increase his height, he was put before the reading board. His eyes were splen-

did; little that passed in hedgerows, or the heavens, in woods, or on the hillsides, could escape them. They asked him to read the print.

Staring, he answered: "L."

"No, my lad, you're guessing."

"L."

The farmer plucked at the recruiting officer's sleeve, his face was twitching, and he whispered hoarsely:

"'E don't know 'is alphabet."

The officer turned and contemplated that short square figure with the browned face so reminiscent of a withered baby, and the little blue eyes staring out under the dusty forelock. Then he grunted, and going up to him, laid a hand on his shoulder.

"*Your* heart's all right, my lad, but you can't pass."

The little cowman looked at him, turned, and went straight out. An hour later he sat again beside the farmer on the way home, staring before him and jolting up and down.

"They won't get me," he said suddenly: "I can fight, but I'se not goin'." A fire of resentment seemed to have been lit within him. That evening he ate his tea, and next day settled down again among his beasts. But whenever, now, the war was mentioned he would look up with his puck-

ered smile which seemed to have in it a resentful amusement, and say:

"They an't got me yet."

His dumb sacrifice passing their comprehension had been rejected—or so it seemed to him. He could not understand why they had spurned him—he was as good as they! His pride was hurt. No! They should not get him now!

1917.

XXIII

PEACE MEETING

COLIN WILDERTON, coming from the west on his way to the Peace Meeting, fell in with John Rudstock, coming from the north, and they walked on together. After they had commented on the news from Russia and the inflation of money, Rudstock said abruptly:

"We shall have a queer meeting, I expect."

"God knows!" answered Wilderton.

And both smiled, conscious that they were uneasy, but predetermined not to show it under any circumstances. Their smiles were different, for Rudstock was a black-browed man with dark beard and strong, thick figure, and Wilderton a very light-built, grey-haired man, with kindly eyes and no health. He had supported the war an immense time, and had only recently changed his attitude. In common with all men of warm feelings, he had at first been profoundly moved by the violation of Belgium. The horrors of the German advance through that little country and

through France, to which he was temperamentally attached, had stirred in him a vigorous detestation, freely expressed in many ways. Extermination, he had felt all those early months, was hardly good enough for brutes who could commit such crimes against humanity and justice; and his sense of the need for signal defeat of a noxious force riding rough-shod over the hard-won decency of human life had survived well into the third year of the war. He hardly knew himself when his feeling had begun—not precisely to change, but to run, as it were, in a different channel. A man of generous instincts, artistic tastes and unsteady nerves too thinly coated with that God-given assurance which alone fits a man for knowing what is good for the world, he had become gradually haunted by the thought that he was not laying down his own life, but only the lives of his own and other people's sons. And the consideration that he was laying them down for the benefit of their own future had lost its grip on him. At moments he was still able to see that the war he had so long supported had not yet attained sufficient defeat of the Prussian military machine to guarantee that future; but his pity and distress for all these young lives cut down without a chance to flower had grown till he had become, as it were, a gambler. What good—he

would think—to secure the future of the young in a Europe which would soon have no young? Every country was suffering hideously—the criminal country not least, thank God! Suppose the war were to go on for another year, two, three years, and then stop from sheer exhaustion of both sides, while all the time these boys were being killed and maimed, for nothing more, perhaps, than could be obtained to-day. What then? True the Government promised victory, but they never promised it within a year. Governments did not die; what if they were to go on promising it a year hence, till everybody else was dead! Did history ever show that victory in the present could guarantee the future? Besides, even if not so openly defeated as was desirable, this damnable Prussianism had got such a knock that it could never again do what it had in the past. These last, however, were but side reflections, toning down for him the fact that his nerves could no longer stand this vicarious butchery of youth. And so he had gradually become that "traitor to his country, a weak-kneed, peace-by-negotiation man." Physically his knees really were weak, and he used to smile a wry smile when he read the expression.

John Rudstock, of vigorous physique, had opposed the war, on principle, from the start, not

because, any more than Wilderton, he approved of Prussianism, but because, as an essentially combative personality, he opposed everything supported by a majority; the greater the majority, the more bitterly he opposed it; and no one would have been more astonished than he at hearing that this was his principle. He preferred to put it that he did not believe in opposing force by force. In peace-time he was a "stalwart," in war-time a "renegade."

The street leading to the chapel which had been engaged seemed quiet enough. Designed to make an impression on public opinion, every care had been taken that the meeting should not attract the public eye. God's protection had been enlisted, but two policemen also stood at the entrance, and half a dozen others were suspiciously near by. A thin trickle of persons, mostly women, were passing through the door. Colin Wilderton, making his way up the aisle to the platform, wrinkled his nose, thinking: 'Stuffy in here.' It had always been his misfortune to love his neighbours individually, but to dislike them in a bunch. On the platform some fifteen men and women were already gathered. He seated himself modestly in the back row, while John Rudstock, less retiring, took his place at the chairman's right hand. The speakers began with a precipi-

tancy hardly usual at a public meeting. Wilderton listened, and thought: 'Dreadfully *cliché;* why can't some one say straight out that boys enough have been killed?' He had become conscious, too, of a muttering noise, as of the tide coming in on a heavy wind; it broke suddenly into component parts—human voices clamouring outside. He heard blows raining on the door, saw sticks smashing in the windows. The audience had risen to its feet, some rushing to defend the doors, others standing irresolute. John Rudstock was holding up the chair he had been sitting on. Wilderton had just time to think: 'I thought so,' when a knot of young men in khaki burst into the chapel, followed by a crowd. He knew he was not much good in a scrimmage, but he placed himself at once in front of the nearest woman. At that moment, however, some soldiers, pouring through a side-door, invaded the platform from behind, and threw him down the steps. He arrived at the bottom with a bump, and was unable to get up because of the crowd around him. Some one fell over him; it was Rudstock, swearing horribly. He still had the chair in his hand, for it hit Wilderton a nasty blow. The latter saw his friend recover his feet and swing the weapon, and with each swing down went some friend or foe, until he had cleared quite a space round him. Wilderton,

still weak and dizzy from his fall, sat watching this Homeric battle. Chairs, books, stools, sticks were flying at Rudstock, who parried them, or diverted their course so that they carried on and hit Wilderton, or crashed against the platform. He heard Rudstock roar like a lion and saw him advance, swinging his chair; down went two young men in khaki, down went a third in mufti; a very tall young soldier, also armed with a chair, dashed forward, and the two fought in single combat. Wilderton had got on his feet by now, and, adjusting his eyeglass, for he could see little without, he caught up a hymn-book, and, flinging it at the crowd with all his force, shouted: "Hoo-bloodyray!" and followed with his fists clenched. One of them encountered what must have been the jaw of an Australian, it was so hard against his hand; he received a vicious punch in the ribs and was again seated on the ground. He could still hear his friend roaring, and the crash of chairs meeting in mid-air. Something fell heavily on him. It was Rudstock—he was insensible. There was a momentary lull, and peering up as best he could from underneath the body, Wilderton saw that the platform had been cleared of all its original inhabitants, and was occupied mainly by youths in navy blue and khaki. A voice called out:

"Order! Silence!"

Rubbing Rudstock's temples with brandy from a flask which he had had the foresight to slip into his pocket, he listened as best he could, with the feet of the crowd jostling his anatomy.

"Here we are, boys," the voice was saying, "and here we'll always be when these treacherous blighters try their games on. No peace, no peace at any price! We've got to show them that we won't have it. Leave the women alone—though they ought to be ashamed of themselves; but for the men—the skunks—shooting's too good for them. Let them keep off the course or we'll make them. We've broken up this meeting, and we'll break up every meeting that tries to talk of peace. Three cheers for the old flag!"

During the cheers which followed Wilderton was discovering signs of returning consciousness in his friend; for Rudstock had begun to breathe heavily. Pouring some brandy into his mouth, he propped him up as best he could against a wooden structure, which he suddenly perceived to be the chapel's modest pulpit. A thought came to his dazed brain. If he could get up into that, as if he had dropped from Heaven, they might almost listen to him. He disengaged his legs from under Rudstock and began crawling up the steps on hands and knees. Once in the pulpit he sat on the

floor below the level of visibility, getting his breath and listening to the cheers. Then, smoothing his hair, he rose, and waited for the cheers to stop. He had calculated rightly. His sudden appearance, his grey hair, eyeglass and smile deceived them for a moment. There was a hush.

"Boys!" he said, "listen to me a second. I want to ask you something. What on earth do you think we came here for? Simply and solely because we can't bear to go on seeing you killed day after day, month after month, year after year. That's all, and it's Christ's truth. Amen!"

A strange gasp and mutter greeted this little speech; then a dull voice called out:

"Pro-German!"

Wilderton flung up his hand.

"The Germans to hell!" he said simply.

The dull voice repeated:

"Pro-German!" And the speaker on the platform called out: "Come out of that! When we want you to beg us off we'll let you know."

Wilderton spun round to him.

"You're all wonderful!" he began, but a hymn-book hit him fearfully on the forehead, and he sank down into the bottom of the pulpit. This last blow, coming on the top of so many others, had deprived him of intelligent consciousness; he was but vaguely aware of more speeches,

cheers and tramplings, then of a long hush, and presently found himself walking out of the chapel door between Rudstock and a policeman. It was not the door by which they had entered, and led to an empty courtyard.

"Can you walk?" said the policeman.

Wilderton nodded.

"Then walk off!" said the policeman, and withdrew again into the house of God.

The two walked, holding each other's arms, a little unsteadily at first. Rudstock had a black eye and a cut on his ear, the blood from which had stained his collar and matted his beard. Wilderton's coat was torn, his forehead bruised, his cheek swollen, and he had a pain in his back which prevented him from walking very upright. They did not speak, but in an archway did what they could, with pins and handkerchiefs and by turning up Rudstock's coat collar, to regain something of respectability. When they were once more under way Rudstock said coldly:

"I heard you. You should have spoken for yourself. I came, as you know, because I don't believe in opposing force by force. At the next peace meeting we hold I shall make that plainer."

Wilderton murmured:

"Yes, yes; I saw you—I'm sure you will. I apologise; I was carried away."

Rudstock went on in a deep voice:

"As for those young devils, they may die to a man if they like! Take my advice and let them alone."

Wilderton smiled on the side which was not swollen.

"Yes," he said sadly, "it does seem difficult to persuade them to go on living. Ah, well!"

"Ah, well!" he said again, five minutes later, "they're wonderful—poor young beggars! I'm very unhappy, Rudstock!"

"I'm not," said Rudstock, "I've enjoyed it in a way! Good-night!"

They shook hands, screwing up their mouths with pain, for their fists were badly bruised, and parted, Rudstock going to the north, Wilderton to the west.

1917.

XXIV

"THE DOG IT WAS THAT DIED"

UNTIL the great war was over I had no idea that some of us who stayed at home made the great sacrifice.

My friend Harburn is, or rather was, a Northumbrian or some kind of northerner, a stocky man of perhaps fifty with close-clipped grizzled hair and moustache and a deep-coloured face. He was a neighbour of mine in the country, and we had the same kind of dogs—Airedales, never less than three at a time, so that for breeding purposes we were useful to each other. We often, too, went up to town by the same train. His occupation was one which gave him opportunity of prominence in public life, but until the war he took little advantage of this, sunk in a kind of bluff indifferentism which was almost cynical. I used to look on him as a typically good-natured, blunt Englishman, rather enjoying his cynicism, and appreciating his open-air tendencies—for he was a devotee of golf and fond of

shooting when he had the chance; a good companion, too, with an open hand to people in distress. He was unmarried, and dwelled in a bungalow-like house not far from mine and next door to a German family called Holsteig, who had lived in England nearly twenty years. I knew them pretty well also—a very united trio—father, mother, and one son. The father, who came from Hanover, was something in the city, the mother was Scotch, and the son—the one I knew best and liked most—had just left his public school. This youth had a frank, open, blue-eyed face, and thick light hair brushed back without a parting—an attractive, rather Norwegian-looking type. His mother was devoted to him—she was a real West Highlander; slight, with dark hair going grey, high cheekbones, a sweet but ironical smile, and those grey eyes which have second sight in them. I several times met Harburn at their house, for he would go in to play billiards with Holsteig in the evenings, and the whole family were on friendly terms with him. The third morning after we had declared war on Germany Harburn, Holsteig, and I went up to town in the same carriage. Harburn and I talked freely. But Holsteig, a fair, well-set-up man of about fifty, with a pointed beard and blue eyes like his son, sat immersed in his paper, till Harburn said rather suddenly:

"I say, Holsteig, is it true that your boy was going off to join the German Army?"

Holsteig looked up.

"Yes," he said. "He was born in Germany, so he's liable to military service. Thank heaven—it isn't possible for him to go!"

"But his mother?" said Harburn. "She surely wouldn't have let him."

"She was very miserable, of course, but she thought duty came first."

"Duty! Good God—my dear man! Half British, and living in this country all his life! I never heard of such a thing!"

Holsteig shrugged his shoulders.

"In a crisis like this what can you do except follow the law strictly? He is of military age and a German subject. We were thinking of his honour; but of course we're most thankful he can't get over to Germany."

"Well, I'm damned!" said Harburn. "You Germans are too bally conscientious altogether."

Holsteig did not answer.

I travelled back with Harburn the same evening, and he said to me:

"Once a German, always a German. Didn't that chap Holsteig astonish you this morning? In spite of living here so long and marrying a British wife his sympathies are dead German, you see."

"Well," I replied, "put yourself in his place."

"I can't; I could never have lived in Germany. I say, Cumbermere," he added, "I wonder if the chap's all right?"

"Of course he's all right." Which was the wrong thing to say to Harburn if one wanted to re-establish his confidence in the Holsteigs, as I certainly did, for I liked them and was sure of their good faith. If I had said: "Of course he's a spy," I should have rallied all Harburn's confidence in Holsteig, for he was naturally contradictious.

I only mention this little passage to show how early Harburn's thoughts began to turn to the subject which afterwards completely absorbed and inspired him till he—er—died for his country.

I am not sure what paper first took up the question of interning all the Huns; but I fancy the point was raised originally rather from the instinct, deeply implanted in so many journals, to do what would please the public than out of any deep animus. At all events, I remember meeting a sub-editor who told me he had been opening letters of approval all the morning. "Never," said he, "have we had a stunt catch on so quickly. 'Why should that bally German round the corner get my custom?' and so forth. Britain for the British!"

"Rather bad luck," I said, "on people who've paid us the compliment of finding this the best country to live in?"

"Bad luck, no doubt," he replied, "but war's war. You know Harburn, don't you? Did you see that article he wrote? By Jove! he pitched it strong."

When next I met Harburn himself he began talking on this subject at once.

"Mark my words," he said, "I'll have every German out of this country." His grey eyes seemed to glint with the snap and spark as of steel and flint and tinder; and I felt I was in the presence of a man who had brooded so over the German atrocities in Belgium that he was possessed by a sort of abstract hate.

"Of course," I said, "there have been many spies, but——"

"Spies and ruffians," he cried, "the whole lot of them."

"How many Germans do you know personally?" I asked him.

"Thank God! not a dozen."

"And are they spies and ruffians?"

He looked at me and laughed, but that laugh was uncommonly like a snarl.

"You go in for fairness," he said, "and all that slop; take 'em by the throat—it's the only way."

It trembled on the tip of my tongue to ask him whether he meant to take the Holsteigs by the throat, but I swallowed it for fear of doing them an injury. I was feeling much the same general abhorrence myself, and had to hold myself in for fear it should gallop over my common sense of justice. But Harburn, I could see, was giving it full rein. His whole manner and personality somehow had changed. He had lost geniality and that good-humoured cynicism which had made him an attractive companion; he was as if gnawed at inwardly—in a word, he already had a fixed idea.

Now, a cartoonist, like myself, has to be interested in the psychology of men, and I brooded over Harburn, for it seemed to me quite remarkable that one whom I had always associated with good humour and bluff indifference should be thus obsessed. And I formed this theory about him: 'Here'—I said to myself—'is one of Cromwell's Ironsides, born out of his age. In the slack times of peace he discovered no outlet for the grim within him—his fire could never be lighted by love, therefore he drifted in the waters of indifferentism. Now, suddenly, in this grizzly time he has found himself, a new man, girt and armed by this new passion of hate; stung and uplifted, as it were, by the sight of that which he can smite with a whole heart. It really is most

deeply interesting. Who could have dreamed of such a reincarnation; for what on the surface could possibly be less like an "Ironside" than Harburn as I've known him up to now?' I used his face for the basis of a cartoon which represented a human weather vane continually pointing to the East, no matter from what quarter the wind blew. He recognised himself, and laughed when he saw me—rather pleased, in fact; but in that laugh there was a sort of truculence as if the man had the salt taste of blood at the back of his mouth.

"Ah!" said he, "you may joke about it, Cumbermere, but I've got my teeth into the swine!"

And there was no doubt he had—the man had become a force; unhappy Germans—a few of them spies, no doubt, but the great majority as certainly innocent—were being wrenched from their trades and families and piled into internment camps all day and every day—and the faster they were piled in, the higher grew his "stock" as a servant of his country. I'm sure he did not do it to gain credit; the thing was a crusade to him, something sacred—"his bit"; but I believe he also felt for the first time in his life that he was really living, getting out of life the full of its juice. Was he not smiting hip and thigh? He longed, I am sure, to be in the thick of the actual

fighting, but age debarred him, and he was not of that more sensitive type which shrinks from smiting the defenceless if it cannot smite anything stronger. I remember saying to him once:

"Harburn, do you ever think of the women and children of your victims?"

He drew his lips back, and I saw how excellent his teeth were.

"The women are worse than the men, I believe," he said. "I'd put them in, too, if I could. As for the children, they're all the better for being without fathers of that kidney."

He really was a little mad on the subject; no more so, of course, than any other man with a fixed idea, but certainly no less.

In those days I was here, there, and everywhere, and had let my country cottage, so I saw nothing of the Holsteigs, and, indeed, had pretty well forgotten their existence. But coming back at the end of 1917 from a long spell with the Red Cross, I found among my letters one from Mrs. Holsteig.

"Dear Mr. Cumbermere,—You were always so friendly to us that I have summoned up courage to write this letter. You know, perhaps, that my husband was interned over a year ago, and repatriated last September; he has lost every-

thing, of course, but so far he is well and able to get along in Germany. Harold and I have been jogging on here as best we can on my own little income—'Huns in our midst' as we are, we see practically nobody. What a pity we cannot all look into each other's hearts, isn't it? I used to think we were a 'fair-play' people, but I have learned the bitter truth, that there is no such thing when pressure comes. It's much worse for Harold than for me; he feels his paralysed position intensely, and would, I'm sure, really rather be 'doing his bit' as an interned, than be at large, subject to every one's suspicion and scorn. But I am terrified all the time that they *will* intern him. You used to be intimate with Mr. Harburn. We have not seen him since the first autumn of the war, but we know that he has been very active in the agitation and is very powerful in this matter. I have wondered whether he can possibly realise what this indiscriminate internment of the innocent means to the families of the interned. Could you not find a chance to try and make him understand? If he and a few others were to stop hounding on the Government, it would cease, for the authorities must know perfectly well that all the dangerous have been disposed of long ago. You have no notion how lonely one feels in one's native land nowadays; if I should lose Harold, too,

I think I might go under, though that has never been my habit.

"Believe me, dear Mr. Cumbermere,

"Most truly yours,

"HELEN HOLSTEIG."

On receiving this letter I was moved by compassion, for it required no stretch of imagination to picture the life of that lonely British mother and her son; and I thought very carefully over the advisability of speaking to Harburn, and consulted the proverbs: "Speech is silver, but silence is gold—When in doubt, play trumps." "Second thoughts are best—He who hesitates is lost." "Look before you leap—Delays are dangerous." They balanced so perfectly that I had recourse to common sense, which told me to abstain. But meeting Harburn at the club a few days later and finding him in a genial mood, I let impulse prevail.

"By the way," I said, "you remember the Holsteigs? I had a letter from poor Mrs. Holsteig the other day; she seems terrified that they'll intern her son, that particularly nice boy. Don't you think it's time you let up on these unhappy people?" The moment I reached the word Holsteig I saw I had made a mistake, and only went on because to have stopped at that would have

been worse still. The hair had bristled up on his back, as it were, and he said:

"Holsteig! That young pup who was off to join the German Army if he could? By George, is he at large still? This Government will never learn. I'll remember him."

"Harburn," I stammered, "I spoke of this in confidence. The boy is half British and a friend of mine. I thought he was a friend of yours, too."

"Of mine?" he said. "No, thank you. No mongrels for me. As to confidence, Cumbermere, there's no such thing in war time over what concerns the country's safety."

"Good God!" I exclaimed. "You really are crazy on this subject. That boy—with his bringing-up!"

He grinned. "We're taking no risks," he said, "and making no exceptions. The British Army or an internment camp. I'll see that he gets the alternative."

"If you do," I said, rising, "we cease to be friends. I won't have my confidence abused."

"Oh! Hang it all," he grumbled, "sit down! We must all do our duty."

"You once complained to Holsteig himself of that German peculiarity."

He laughed. "I did," he said; "I remember—in the train. I've changed since then. That pup

ought to be in with all the other swine-hounds. But let it go."

There the matter rested, for he had said: "Let it go," and he was a man of his word. It was, however, a lesson to me not to meddle with men of temperament so different from my own. I wrote to young Holsteig and asked him to come and lunch with me. He thanked me, but could not, of course, being confined to a five-mile radius. Really anxious to see him, I motor-biked down to their house. I found a very changed youth; moody and introspective, thoroughly forced in upon himself, and growing bitter. He had been destined for his father's business, and, marooned as he was by his nationality, had nothing to do but raise vegetables in their garden and read poetry and philosophy, not occupations to take a young man out of himself. Mrs. Holsteig, whose nerves were evidently at cracking point, had become extremely bitter and lost all power of seeing the war as a whole. All the ugly human qualities and hard people which the drive and pressure of a great struggle inevitably bring to the fore seemed viewed by her now as if they were the normal character of her fellow countrymen, and she made no allowance for the fact that those fellow countrymen had not commenced this struggle, nor for the certainty that the same ugly qualities

and hard people were just as surely to the fore in every other of the fighting countries. The certainty she felt about her husband's honour had made her regard his internment and subsequent repatriation as a personal affront as well as a wicked injustice. Her tall, thin figure and high-cheekboned face seemed to have been scorched and withered by some inner flame; she could not have been a wholesome companion for her boy in that house, empty even of servants. I spent a difficult afternoon in muzzling my sense of proportion, and journeyed back to town sore, but very sorry.

I was off again with the Red Cross shortly after, and did not return to England till August of 1918. I was unwell, and went down to my cottage, now free to me again.

The influenza epidemic was raging, and there I developed a mild attack; when I was convalescent my first visitor was Harburn, who had come down to his bungalow for a summer holiday. He had not been in the room five minutes before he was off on his favourite topic. My nerves must have been on edge from illness, for I cannot express the disgust with which I listened to him on that occasion. He seemed to me just like a dog who mumbles and chews a mouldy old bone with a sort of fury. There was a kind of tri-

umph about him, too, which was unpleasant, though not surprising, for he was more of a force than ever.

'God save me from the fixed idea!' I thought, when he had gone. That evening I asked my old housekeeper if she had seen young Mr. Holsteig lately.

"Oh! no," she said, "he's been put away this five month. Mrs. Holsteig goes up once a week to see 'im. She's nigh out of her mind, poor lady, the baker says—that fierce she is about the Government for takin' 'im off."

I confess I could not bring myself to go and see her.

About a month after the armistice had been signed I came down to my cottage again. Harburn was in the same train, and he gave me a lift from the station. He was more like his old good-humoured self, and asked me to dinner the next day. It was the first time I had met him since the victory. We had a most excellent repast, and drank the health of the Future in some of his oldest port. Only when we had drawn up to the blazing wood fire in that softly lighted room, with our glasses beside us and two Airedales asleep at our feet, did he come round to his hobby.

"What do you think?" he said, suddenly lean-

ing toward the flames. "Some of these blazing sentimentalists want to release our Huns. But I've put my foot on it; they won't get free till they're out of this country and back in their precious Germany." And I saw the familiar spark and smoulder in his eyes.

"Harburn," I said, moved by an impulse which I couldn't resist, "I think you ought to take a pill."

He stared at me.

"This way madness lies," I went on. "Hate is a damned insidious disease, men's souls can't stand very much of it, you know. You want purging."

He laughed.

"Hate! I thrive on it. The more I hate the brutes the better I feel. Here's to the death of every cursed Hun!"

I looked at him steadily. "I often think," I said, "that there could have been no more unhappy men on earth than Cromwell's Ironsides or the red revolutionaries in France when their work was over and done with."

"What's that to do with me?" he asked, amazed.

"They too smote out of hate and came to an end of their smiting. When a man's occupation gone——"

"You're drivelling," he said sharply.

"Far from it," I answered, nettled. "Yours is a curious case, Harburn. Most of our professional Hun-haters have found it a good stunt or are merely weak sentimentalists; they can drop it easily enough when it ceases to be a good stunt or a parrot's war cry. You can't. With you it's mania, religion. When the tide ebbs and leaves you high and dry——"

He struck his fist on the arm of his chair, upsetting his glass and awakening the Airedale at his feet.

"I won't let it ebb," he said. "I'm going on with this—mark me!"

"Remember Canute!" I muttered. "May I have some more port?" I had got up to fill my glass when I saw to my astonishment that a woman was standing in the long window which opened on to the verandah. She had evidently only just come in, for she was still holding the curtain in her hand. It was Mrs. Holsteig, with her fine grey hair blown about her face, looking strange and almost ghostly in a grey gown. Harburn had not seen her, so I went quickly towards her, hoping to get her to go out again as silently and speak to me on the verandah; but she held up her hand with a gesture as if she would push me back, and said:

"Forgive my interrupting; I came to speak to that man."

Startled by the sound of her voice, Harburn jumped up and spun round towards it.

"Yes," she repeated quite quietly, "I came to speak to you; I came to put my curse on you. Many have put their curses on you silently, I do so to your face. My son lies between life and death in your prison—*your* prison. Whether he lives or dies I curse you for what you have done to poor wives and mothers—to British wives and mothers. Be for ever accursed! Good-night!"

She let the curtain fall and had vanished before Harburn had time to reach the window. She vanished so swiftly and silently, she had spoken so quietly, that both he and I stood rubbing our eyes and ears.

"Pretty theatrical!" he said at last.

"But quite real," I answered slowly; "you have been cursed by a live Scotswoman. Look at those dogs!"

The two Airedales were standing stock-still with the hair bristling on their backs.

Harburn suddenly laughed, and it jarred the whole room.

"By George!" he said, "I believe that's actionable."

But I was not in that mood and answered tartly:

"If it is, we are all food for judges."

He laughed again, this time uneasily, slammed the window to, bolted it, and sat down again in his chair.

"He's got the 'flu, I suppose," he said. "She must think me a prize sort of idiot to have come here with such tomfoolery." But our evening was spoiled and I took my leave almost at once. I went out into the roupy raw December night pondering deeply. Harburn had made light of it, and though I suppose no man likes being cursed to his face in the presence of a friend, I felt his skin was quite tough enough to stand it. Besides, it was too cheap and crude a way of carrying on. Anybody can go into his neighbour's house and curse him—and no bones broken. And yet—what she had said was no doubt true; hundreds of women—of his fellow country-women—must silently have put their curse on one who had been the chief compeller of their misery. Still, he had put *his* curse on the Huns and their belongings, and I felt he was man enough to take what he had given. 'No,' I thought, 'she has only fanned the flame of his hate. But, by Jove! that's just it! Her curse has fortified my prophecy.' It was *of his own state of mind* that he would perish, and

she had whipped and deepened that state of mind. And, odd as it may seem, I felt sorry for him, as one is for a dog that goes mad, does what harm he can, and dies. I lay awake that night a long time thinking of him, and of that unhappy half-crazed mother, whose son lay between life and death.

Next day I went to see her, but she was up in London, hovering round the cage of her son, no doubt. I heard from her, however, some days later, thanking me for coming and saying he was out of danger. But she made no allusion to that evening visit. Perhaps she was ashamed of it. Perhaps she was demented when she came and had no remembrance thereof.

Soon after this I went to Belgium to illustrate a book on Reconstruction, and found such subjects that I was not back in town till the late summer of 1919. Going into my club one day I came on Harburn in the smoking-room. The curse had not done him much harm, it seemed, for he looked the picture of health.

"Well, how are you?" I said. "You look at the top of your form."

"Never better," he replied.

"Do you remember our last evening together?"

He uttered a sort of gusty grunt and did not answer.

"That boy recovered," I said. "What's happened to him and his mother since?"

"Ironical young brute! I've just had this from him." And he handed me a letter with a Hanover post-mark.

"Dear Mr. Harburn,—It was only on meeting my mother here yesterday that I learned of her visit to you one evening last December. I wish to apologise for it, since it was my illness which caused her to so forget herself. I owe you a deep debt of gratitude for having been at least partly the means of giving me the most wonderful experience of my life. In that camp of sorrow —where there was sickness of mind such as I am sure you have never seen or realised, such endless, hopeless mental anguish of poor huddled creatures turning and turning on themselves year after year—I learned to forget myself, and to do my little best for them. And I learned, and I hope I shall never forget it, that good will towards his fellow creatures is all that stands between man and death in life; I was going fast the other way before I was sent there. I thank you from my heart, and beg to remain,

"Very faithfully yours,

"Harold Holsteig."

I put it down and said:

"That's not ironical. He means it."

"Bosh!" said Harburn, with the old spark and smoulder in his eyes: "He's pulling my leg—the swinelet Hun-prig."

"He is not, Harburn; I assure you."

Harburn got up.

"He *is;* I tell you he *is.* Ah! those brutes! Well! I haven't done with them yet."

And I heard the snap of his jaw and saw his eyes fixed fiercely on some imagined object. I changed the subject hurriedly and soon took my departure. But going down the steps an old jingle came into my head and has hardly left it since:

> "The man recovered of the bite,
> The dog it was that died."

1919.

XXV

THE MOTHER STONE

IT was after dinner, and five elderly Englishmen were discussing the causes of the war.

"Well," said Travers, a big, fresh-coloured grey-beard, with little twinkling eyes and very slow speech, "you gentlemen know more about it than I do, but I bet you I can lay my finger on the cause of the war at any minute."

There was an instant clamour of jeering. But a man called Askew, who knew Travers well, laughed and said: "Come, let's have it!" Travers turned those twinkling little eyes of his slowly round the circle and with heavy, hesitating modesty began:

"Well, Mr. Askew, it was in '67 or '68 that this happened to a great big feller of my acquaintance named Ray—one of those fellers, you know, that are always on the look-out to make their fortunes and never do. This Ray was coming back south one day after a huntin' trip he'd been in what's now called Bechuanaland, and he

was in a pretty bad way when he walked one evenin' into the camp of one of those wanderin' Boers. That class of Boer has disappeared now. They had no farms of their own, but just moved on with their stock and their boys; and when they came to good pasture they'd outspan and stay there till they'd cleared it out—and then trek on again. Well, this old Boer told Ray to come right in and take a meal; and Heaven knows what it was made of, for those old Boers they'd eat the devil himself without onion sauce, and relish him. After the meal the old Boer and Ray sat smokin' and yarnin' in the door of the tent, because in those days these wanderin' Boers used tents. Right close by in the front the children were playin' in the dust, a game like marbles with three or four round stones, and they'd pitch 'em up to another stone they called the Moer-Klip, or Mother Stone—one, two, and pick up; two, three, and pick up—you know the game of marbles. Well, the sun was settin' and presently Ray noticed this Moer-Klip that they were pitchin' 'em up to shinin'; and he looked at it, and he said to the old Boer: 'What's that stone the children are playin' with?' And the old Boer looked at him and looked at the stone, and said: 'It's just a stone,' and went on smokin'.

"Well, Ray went down on his knees and picked

up the stone and weighed it in his hand. About the size of a hazel-nut it was and looked—well, it looked like a piece of alum; but the more he looked at it the more he thought: 'By Jove, I believe it's a diamond!'

"So he said to the old Boer: 'Where did the children get this stone?' And the old Boer said: 'Oh! the shepherd picked it up somewhere.' And Ray said: '*Where* did he pick it up?' And the old Boer waved his hand, and said: 'Over the kopje, there, beyond the river. How should I know, brother?—a stone is a stone!' So Ray said: 'You let me take this stone away with me.' And the old Boer went on smokin', and he said: 'One stone's the same as another. Take it, brother.' And Ray said: 'If it's what I think, I'll give you half the price I get for it.'

"The old Boer smiled and said: 'That's all right, brother; take it, take it!'

"The next morning Ray left this old Boer, and, when he was going, he said to him: 'Well,' he said, 'I believe this is a valuable stone!' And the old Boer smiled because he knew one stone was the same as another.

"The first place Ray came to was C——, and he went to the hotel; and in the evenin' he began talkin' about the stone, and they all laughed at him, because in those days nobody had heard of

diamonds in South Africa. So presently he lost his temper and pulled out the stone and showed it round; but nobody thought it was a diamond, and they all laughed at him the more. Then one of the fellers said: 'If it's a diamond it ought to cut glass.'

"Ray took the stone, and, by Jove! he cut his name on the window, and there it is—I've seen it —on the bar window of that hotel. Well, next day, you bet, he travelled straight back to where the old Boer told him the shepherd had picked up the stone, and he went to a native chief called Jointje, and said to him: 'Jointje,' he said, 'I go a journey. While I go, you go about and send all your "boys" about, and look for all the stones that shine like this one; and when I come back, if you find me plenty, I give you gun.' And Jointje said: 'That all right, boss.'

"And Ray went down to Cape Town and took the stone to a jeweller, and the jeweller told him it was a diamond of about 30 or 40 carats and gave him five hundred pound for it. So he bought a waggon and a span of oxen to give to the old Boer, and went back to Jointje. The niggers had collected skinfuls of stones of all kinds, and out of all the skinfuls Ray found three or four diamonds. So he went to work and got another feller to back him, and between them they made the

Government move. The rush began, and they found that place near Kimberley; and after that they found De Beers, and after that Kimberley itself."

Travers stopped and looked around him.

"Ray made his fortune, I suppose?"

"No, Mr. Askew; the unfortunate feller made next to nothin'. He was one of those fellers that never do any good for themselves."

"But what has all this to do with the war?"

Again Travers looked round, and more slowly than ever said:

"Without that game of marbles, would there have been a Moer-Klip—without the Moer-Klip, would there have been a Kimberley—without Kimberley, would there have been a Rhodes—without a Rhodes would there have been a Raid—without a Raid, would the Boers have started armin'—if the Boers hadn't armed, would there have been a Transvaal War? And if there hadn't been the Transvaal War, would there have been the incident of those two German ships we held up, and all the general feelin' in Germany that gave the Kaiser the chance to start his Navy programme in 1900? And if the Germans hadn't built their Navy, would their heads have swelled till they challenged the world, and should we have had this war?"

He slowly drew a hand from his pocket and put it on the table. On the little finger was blazing an enormous diamond.

"My father," he said, "bought it of the jeweller."

The Mother Stone glittered and glowed, and the five Englishmen fixed their eyes on it in silence. Some of them had been in the Boer War and three of them had sons in this. At last one of them said:

"Well, that's seeing God in a dew-drop with a vengeance. What about the old Boer?"

Travers's little eyes twinkled.

"Well," he said, "Ray told me the old feller just looked at him as if he thought he'd done a damn silly thing to give him a waggon; and he nodded his old head and said, laughin' in his beard: 'Wish you good luck, brother, with your stone.' You couldn't humbug that old Boer; he knew one stone was the same as another."

1914.

XXVI

SPINDLEBERRIES

THE celebrated painter, Scudamore —whose studies of Nature had been hung on the line for so many years that he had forgotten the days when, not yet in the Scudamore manner, they depended from the sky—stood where his cousin had left him so abruptly. His lips, between comely grey moustache and comely pointed beard, wore a mortified smile, and he gazed rather dazedly at the spindleberries fallen on to the flagged courtyard from the branch she had brought to show him. Why had she thrown up her head as if he had struck her, and whisked round so that those dull-pink berries quivered and lost their rain-drops, and four had fallen? He had but said: "Charming! I'd like to use them!" And she had answered: "God!" and rushed away. Alicia really was crazed; who would have thought that once she had been so adorable? He stooped and picked up the four berries—a beautiful colour, that dull pink! And from below the coatings of success and the Scudamore man-

ner a little thrill came up; the stir of emotional vision. Paint! What good? How express? He went across to the low wall which divided the courtyard of his expensively restored and beautiful old house from the first flood of the River Arun wandering silvery in pale winter sunlight. Yes, indeed! How express Nature, its translucence and mysterious unities, its mood never the same from hour to hour? Those brown-tufted rushes over there against the gold grey of light and water—those restless, hovering, white gulls. A kind of disgust at his own celebrated manner welled up within him—the disgust expressed in Alicia's: "God!" Beauty! What use—how express it? Had she been thinking the same thing?

He looked at the four pink berries glistening on the grey stone of the wall and memory stirred. What a lovely girl she had been, with her grey-green eyes shining under long lashes, the rose-petal colour in her cheeks and the too-fine dark hair—now so very grey—always blowing a little wild. An enchanting, enthusiastic creature! He remembered, as if it had been but last week, that day when they started from Arundel Station by the road to Burpham, when he was twenty-nine and she twenty-five, both of them painters and neither of them famed—a day of showers and sunlight in the middle of March, and Nature pre-

paring for full spring! How they had chattered at first; and when their arms touched, how he had thrilled, and the colour had deepened in her rain-wet cheeks; and then, gradually, they had grown silent; a wonderful walk, which seemed leading so surely to a more wonderful end. They had wandered round through the village and down past the chalk-pit and Jacob's ladder, into the field path and so to the river bank. And he had taken her ever so gently round the waist, still silent, waiting for that moment when his heart would leap out of him in words and hers—he was sure—would leap to meet it. The path entered a thicket of blackthorn with a few primroses close to the little river running full and gentle. The last drops of a shower were falling, but the sun had burst through, and the sky above the thicket was cleared to the blue of speedwell flowers. Suddenly she had stopped and cried: "Look, Dick! Oh, look! It's heaven!" A high bush of blackthorn was lifted there, starry white against the blue and that bright cloud. It seemed to sing, it was so lovely; the whole of spring was in it. But the sight of her ecstatic face had broken down all his restraint, and tightening his arm round her he had kissed her lips. He remembered still the expression of her face, like a child's startled out of sleep. She had gone rigid, gasped, started away

from him, quivered and gulped, and broken suddenly into sobs. Then, slipping from his arm, she had fled. He had stood at first, amazed and hurt, utterly bewildered; then, recovering a little, had hunted for her full half an hour before at last he found her sitting on wet grass, with a stony look on her face. He had said nothing, and she nothing, except to murmur: "Let's go on; we shall miss our train!" And all the rest of that day and the day after, until they parted, he had suffered from the feeling of having tumbled down off some high perch in her estimation. He had not liked it at all; it had made him very angry. Never from that day to this had he thought of it as anything but a piece of wanton prudery. Had it—had it been something else?

He looked at the four pink berries, and, as if they had uncanny power to turn the wheel of memory, he saw another vision of his cousin five years later. He was married by then, and already hung on the line. With his wife he had gone down to Alicia's country cottage. A summer night, just dark and very warm. After many exhortations she had brought into the little drawing-room her last finished picture. He could see her now placing it where the light fell, her tall, slight form already rather sharp and meagre, as the figures of some women grow at thirty, if they are not married;

the nervous, fluttering look on her charming face, as though she could hardly bear this inspection; the way she raised her shoulder just a little as if to ward off an expected blow of condemnation. No need! It had been a beautiful thing, a quite surprisingly beautiful study of night. He remembered with what a really jealous ache he had gazed at it—a better thing than he had ever done himself. And, frankly, he had said so. Her eyes had shone with pleasure.

"Do you really like it? I tried so hard!"

"The day you show that, my dear," he had said, "your name's made!" She had clasped her hands and simply sighed: "Oh, Dick!" He had felt quite happy in her happiness, and presently the three of them had taken their chairs out, beyond the curtains, on to the dark verandah, had talked a little, then somehow fallen silent. A wonderful warm, black, grape-bloom night, exquisitely gracious and inviting; the stars very high and white, the flowers glimmering in the garden-beds, and against the deep, dark blue, roses hanging, unearthly, stained with beauty. There was a scent of honeysuckle, he remembered, and many moths came fluttering by toward the tall, narrow chink of light between the curtains. Alicia had sat leaning forward, elbows on knees, ears buried in her hands. Probably they were silent because she

sat like that. Once he heard her whisper to herself: "Lovely, lovely! Oh, God! How lovely!" His wife, feeling the dew, had gone in, and he had followed; Alicia had not seemed to notice. But when she too came in, her eyes were glistening with tears. She said something about bed in a queer voice; they had taken candles and gone up. Next morning, going to her little studio to give her advice about that picture, he had been literally horrified to see it streaked with lines of white —Alicia, standing before it, was dashing her brush in broad smears across and across. She heard him and turned round. There was a hard red spot in either cheek, and she said in a quivering voice: "It was blasphemy. That's all!" And turning her back on him she had gone on smearing it with white. Without a word, he had turned tail in simple disgust. Indeed, so deep had been his vexation at that wanton destruction of the best thing she had ever done or was ever likely to do, that he had avoided her for years. He had always had a horror of eccentricity. To have planted her foot firmly on the ladder of fame and then deliberately kicked it away; to have wantonly foregone this chance of making money—for she had but a mere pittance! It had seemed to him really too exasperating, a thing only to be explained by tapping one's forehead. Every now

and then he still heard of her, living down there, spending her days out in the woods and fields, and sometimes even her nights, they said, and steadily growing poorer and thinner and more eccentric; becoming, in short, impossibly difficult, as only Englishwomen can. People would speak of her as "such a dear," and talk of her charm, but always with that shrug which is hard to bear when applied to one's relations. What she did with the productions of her brush he never inquired, too disillusioned by that experience. Poor Alicia!

The pink berries glowed on the grey stone, and he had yet another memory. A family occasion when Uncle Martin Scudamore departed this life, and they all went up to bury him and hear his will. The old chap, whom they had looked on as a bit of a disgrace, money-grubbing up in the little grey Yorkshire town which owed its rise to his factory, was expected to make amends by his death, for he had never married—too sunk in industry, apparently, to have the time. By tacit agreement, his nephews and nieces had selected the Inn at Bolton Abbey, nearest beauty spot, for their stay. They had driven six miles to the funeral, in three carriages. Alicia had gone with him and his brother, the solicitor. In her plain black clothes she looked quite charming, in spite

of the silver threads already thick in her fine dark hair, loosened by the moor wind. She had talked of painting to him with all her old enthusiasm, and her eyes had seemed to linger on his face as if she still had a little weakness for him. He had quite enjoyed that drive. They had come rather abruptly on the small grimy town clinging to the river banks, with old Martin's long, yellow-brick house dominating it, about two hundred yards above the mills. Suddenly, under the rug, he felt Alicia's hand seize his with a sort of desperation, for all the world as if she were clinging to something to support her. Indeed, he was sure she did not know it was his hand she squeezed. The cobbled streets, the muddy looking water, the dingy, staring factories, the yellow, staring house, the little dark-clothed, dreadfully plain workpeople, all turned out to do a last honour to their creator; the hideous new grey church, the dismal service, the brand-new tombstones—and all of a glorious autumn day! It was inexpressibly sordid—too ugly for words! Afterwards the will was read to them seated decorously on bright mahogany chairs in the yellow mansion, a very satisfactory will, distributing in perfectly adjusted portions, to his own kinsfolk and nobody else, a very considerable wealth. Scudamore had listened to it dreamily, with his eyes fixed on an

oily picture, thinking, 'My God! What a thing!' and longing to be back in the carriage smoking a cigar to take the reek of black clothes and sherry —sherry!—out of his nostrils. He happened to look at Alicia. Her eyes were closed; her lips, always sweet-looking, quivered amusedly. And at that very moment the will came to her name. He saw those eyes open wide, and marked a beautiful pink flush, quite like that of old days, come into her thin cheeks. 'Splendid!' he had thought; 'it's really jolly for her. I *am* glad! Now she won't have to pinch. Splendid!' He shared with her to the full the surprised relief showing in her still beautiful face.

All the way home in the carriage he felt at least as happy over her good fortune as over his own, which had been substantial. He took her hand under the rug and squeezed it, and she answered with a long, gentle pressure, quite unlike the clutch when they were driving in. That same evening he strolled out to where the river curved below the Abbey. The sun had not quite set, and its last smoky radiance slanted into the burnished autumn woods. Some white-faced Herefords were grazing in lush grass, the river rippled and gleamed, all over golden scales. About that scene was the magic which has so often startled the hearts of painters, the wistful gold—the enchant-

ment of a dream. For some minutes he had gazed with delight which had in it a sort of despair. A little crisp rustle ran along the bushes; the leaves fluttered, then hung quite still. And he heard a voice—Alicia's—speaking. "The lovely, lovely world!" And moving forward a step, he saw her standing on the river bank, braced against the trunk of a birch tree, her head thrown back, and her arms stretched wide apart as though to clasp the lovely world she had apostrophised. To have gone up to her would have been like breaking up a lovers' interview, and he turned round instead and went away.

A week later he heard from his brother that Alicia had refused her legacy. "I don't want it," her letter had said simply; "I couldn't bear to take it. Give it to those poor people who live in that awful place." Really eccentricity could go no further! They decided to go down and see her. Such mad neglect of her own good must not be permitted without some effort to prevent it. They found her very thin, and charming; humble, but quite obstinate in her refusal. "Oh! I couldn't really! I should be so unhappy. Those poor little stunted people who made it all for him! That little, awful town! I simply couldn't be reminded. Don't talk about it, please. I'm quite all right as I am." They had threatened her with lurid pic-

tures of the workhouse and a destitute old age. To no purpose, she would not take the money. She had been forty when she refused that aid from heaven—forty, and already past any hope of marriage. For though Scudamore had never known for certain that she had ever wished or hoped for marriage, he had his theory—that all her eccentricity came from wasted sexual instinct. This last folly had seemed to him monstrous enough to be pathetic, and he no longer avoided her. Indeed, he would often walk over to tea in her little hermitage. With Uncle Martin's money he had bought and restored the beautiful old house over the River Arun, and was now only five miles from Alicia's, across country. She, too, would come tramping over at all hours, floating in with wild flowers or ferns, which she would put into water the moment she arrived. She had ceased to wear hats, and had by now a very doubtful reputation for sanity about the countryside. This was the period when Watts was on every painter's tongue, and he seldom saw Alicia without a disputation concerning that famous symbolist. Personally, he had no use for Watts, resenting his faulty drawing and crude allegories, but Alicia always maintained with her extravagant fervour that he was great because he tried to paint the soul of things. She especially loved a

painting called "Iris"—a female symbol of the rainbow, which indeed, in its floating eccentricity, had a certain resemblance to herself. "Of course he failed," she would say; "he tried for the impossible and went on trying all his life. Oh! I can't bear your rules and catchwords, Dick; what's the good of them! Beauty's too big, too deep!" Poor Alicia! She was sometimes very wearing.

He never knew quite how it came about that she went abroad with them to Dauphiné in the autumn of 1904—a rather disastrous business. Never again would he take any one travelling who did not know how to come in out of the cold. It was a painter's country and he had hired a little *château* in front of the Glandaz mountain—himself, his wife, their eldest girl, and Alicia. The adaptation of his famous manner to that strange scenery, its browns and French greys and filmy blues, so preoccupied him that he had scant time for becoming intimate with these hills and valleys. From the little gravelled terrace in front of the annex, out of which he had made a studio, there was an absorbing view over the pantiled old town of Die. It glistened below in the early or late sunlight, flat-roofed and of pinkish yellow, with the dim, blue River Drôme circling one side, and cut, dark cypress trees dotting the vine-

yarded slopes. And he painted it continually. What Alicia did with herself they none of them very much knew, except that she would come in and talk ecstatically of things and beasts and people she had seen. One favourite haunt of hers they did visit, a ruined monastery high up in the amphitheatre of the Glandaz mountain. They had their lunch up there, a very charming and remote spot, where the watercourses and ponds and chapel of the old monks were still visible, though converted by the farmer to his use. Alicia left them abruptly in the middle of their praises, and they had not seen her again till they found her at home when they got back. It was almost as if she had resented laudation of her favourite haunt. She had brought in with her a great bunch of golden berries, of which none of them knew the name; berries almost as beautiful as these spindleberries glowing on the stone of the wall. And a fourth memory of Alicia came.

Christmas Eve, a sparkling frost, and every tree round the little *château* rimed so that they shone in the starlight as though dowered with cherry blossom. Never were more stars in clear black sky above the whitened earth. Down in the little town a few faint points of yellow light twinkled in the mountain wind keen as a razor's edge. A fantastically lovely night—quite "Japa-

nese," but cruelly cold. Five minutes on the terrace had been enough for all of them except Alicia. She—unaccountable, crazy creature—would not come in. Twice he had gone out to her, with commands, entreaties, and extra wraps; the third time he could not find her, she had deliberately avoided his onslaught and slid off somewhere to keep this mad vigil by frozen starlight. When at last she did come in she reeled as if drunk. They tried to make her really drunk, to put warmth back into her. No good! In two days she was down with double pneumonia; it was two months before she was up again—a very shadow of herself. There had never been much health in her since then. She floated like a ghost through life, a crazy ghost, who still would steal away, goodness knew where, and come in with a flush in her withered cheeks, and her grey hair wild blown, carrying her spoil—some flower, some leaf, some tiny bird or little soft rabbit. She never painted now, never even talked of it. They had made her give up her cottage and come to live with them, literally afraid that she would starve herself to death in her forgetfulness of everything. These spindleberries even! Why, probably, she had been right up this morning to that sunny chalk-pit in the lew of the Downs to get them, seven miles there and back, when you wouldn't

think she could walk seven hundred yards, and as likely as not had lain there on the dewy grass looking up at the sky, as he had come on her sometimes. Poor Alicia! And once he had been within an ace of marrying her! A life spoiled! By what, if not by love of beauty? But who would have ever thought that the intangible could wreck a woman, deprive her of love, marriage, motherhood, of fame, of wealth, of health? And yet—by George!—it had!

Scudamore flipped the four pink berries off the wall. The radiance and the meandering milky waters; that swan against the brown tufted rushes; those far, filmy Downs—there was beauty! *Beauty!* But, damn it all—moderation! Moderation! And, turning his back on that prospect, which he had painted so many times, in his celebrated manner, he went in, and up the expensively restored staircase to his studio. It had great windows on three sides, and perfect means for regulating light. Unfinished studies melted into walls so subdued that they looked like atmosphere. There were no completed pictures—they sold too fast. As he walked over to his easel his eye was caught by a spray of colour—the branch of spindleberries set in water, ready for him to use, just where the pale sunlight fell so that their delicate colour might glow and the few

tiny drops of moisture still clinging to them shine. For a second he saw Alicia herself as she must have looked, setting them there, her transparent hands hovering, her eyes shining, that grey hair of hers all fine and loose. The vision vanished! But what had made her bring them after that horrified "God"! when he spoke of using them? Was it her way of saying: "Forgive me for being rude"? Really she was pathetic, that poor devotee! The spindleberries glowed in their silver-lustre jug, sprayed up against the sunlight. They looked triumphant—as well they might, who stood for that which had ruined—or was it saved? —a life! Alicia! She had made a pretty mess of it, and yet who knew what secret raptures she had felt with her subtle lover, Beauty, by starlight and sunlight and moonlight, in the fields and woods, on the hilltops, and by riverside? Flowers, and the flight of birds, and the ripple of the wind, and all the shifting play of light and colour which made a man despair when he wanted to use them; she had taken them, hugged them to her with no afterthought, and been happy! Who could say that she had missed the prize of life? Who could say it? . . . Spindleberries! A bunch of spindleberries to set such doubts astir in him! Why, what was beauty but just the extra value which certain forms and colours, blended, gave to

things—just the extra value in the human market! Nothing else on earth, nothing! And the spindleberries glowed against the sunlight, delicate, remote!

Taking his palette, he mixed crimson lake, white, and ultramarine. What was that? Who sighed, away out there behind him? Nothing!

'Damn it all!' he thought; 'this is childish. This is as bad as Alicia!' And he set to work to paint in his celebrated manner—spindleberries.

1918.

XXVII

EXPECTATIONS

OT many years ago a couple were living in the south of England whose name was Wotchett—Ralph and Eileen Wotchett; a curious name, derived, Ralph asserted, from a Saxon Thegn called Otchar, mentioned in Domesday, or at all events—when search of the book had proved vain—on the edge of that substantial record.

He—possibly the thirtieth descendant of the Thegn—was close on six feet in height and thin, with thirsty eyes, and a smile which had fixed itself in his cheeks, so on the verge of appearing was it. His hair waved and was of a dusty shade bordering on grey. His wife, of the same age and nearly the same height as himself, was of sanguine colouring and a Cornish family, which had held land in such a manner that it had nearly melted in their grasp. All that had come to Eileen was a reversion, on the mortgageable value of which she and Ralph had been living for some

time. Ralph Wotchett also had expectations. By profession he was an architect, but perhaps because of his expectations, he had always had bad luck. The involutions of the reasons why his clients died, became insolvent, abandoned their projects, or otherwise failed to come up to the scratch were followed by him alone in the full of their maze-like windings. The house they inhabited, indeed, was one of those he had designed for a client, but the "fat chough" had refused to go into it for some unaccountable reason; he and Eileen were only perching there, however, on the edge of settling down in some more permanent house when they came into their expectations.

Considering the vicissitudes and disappointments of their life together, it was remarkable how certain they remained that they would at last cross the bar and reach the harbour of comfortable circumstances. They had, one may suppose, expectations in their blood. The germ of getting "something for nothing" had infected their systems, so that, though they were not selfish or greedy people, and well knew how to rough it, they dreamed so of what they had not that they continually got rid of what they had in order to obtain more of it. If, for example, Ralph received an order, he felt so strongly that this was the chance of his life if properly grasped, that he

would almost as a matter of course increase and complicate the project till it became unworkable, or in his zeal omit some vital calculation such as a rise in the price of bricks; nor would any one be more surprised than he at this, or more certain that all connected with the matter had been "fat choughs" except—himself. On such occasions Eileen would get angry, but if any one suggested that Ralph had over-reached himself, she would get still angrier. She was very loyal, and unfortunately rather flyaway both in mind and body; before long she always joined him in his feeling that the whole transaction had been just the usual "skin-game" on the part of Providence to keep them out of their expectations. It was the same in domestic life. If Ralph had to eat a breakfast, which would be almost every morning, he had so many and such imaginative ways of getting from it a better breakfast than was in it that he often remained on the edge of it, as it were. He had special methods of cooking, so as to extract from everything a more than ordinary flavour, and these took all the time that he would have to eat the results in. Coffee he would make with a whole egg, shell and all, stirred in; it had to be left on the hob for an incomparable time, and he would start to catch his train with his first cup in his hand; Eileen would have to run after

him and take it away. They were, in fact, rather like a kitten which knows it has a tail, and will fly round and round all day with the expectation of catching that desirable appendage. Sometimes indeed, by sheer perseverance, of which he had a great deal in a roundabout way, Ralph would achieve something, but, when this happened, something else, not foreseen by him, had always happened first, which rendered that accomplishment nugatory and left it expensive on his hands. Nevertheless, they retained their faith that some day they would get ahead of Providence and come into their own.

In view of not yet having come into their expectations they had waited to have children; but two had rather unexpectedly been born. The babes had succumbed, however, one to preparation for betterment too ingenious to be fulfilled, the other to fulfilment itself, a special kind of food having been treated so ingeniously that it had undoubtedly engendered poison. And they remained childless.

They were about fifty when Ralph received one morning a solicitor's letter announcing the death of his godmother, Aunt Lispeth. When he read out the news they looked at their plates a full minute without speaking. Their expectations had matured. At last they were to come into some-

thing in return for nothing. Aunt Lispeth, who had latterly lived at Ipswich in a house which he had just not built for her, was an old maid. They had often discussed what she would leave them—though in no mean or grasping spirit, for they did not grudge the "poor old girl" her few remaining years, however they might feel that she was long past enjoying herself. The chance would come to them some time, and when it did of course must be made the best of. Then Eileen said:

"You must go down at once, Ralph!"

Donning black, Ralph set off hurriedly, and just missed his train; he caught one, however, in the afternoon, and arrived that evening in Ipswich. It was October, drizzling and dark; the last cab moved out as he tried to enter it, for he had been detained by his ticket, which he had put for extra readiness in his glove, and forgotten—as if the ticket collector couldn't have seen it there, the "fat chough!" He walked up to his aunt's house, and was admitted to a mansion where a dinner-party was going on. It was impossible to persuade the servant that this was his aunt's, so he was obliged to retire to an hotel and wire to Eileen to send him the right address—the "fat choughs" in the street did not seem to know it. He got her answer the following mid-day, and going to the proper number, found the darkened

house. The two servants who admitted him described the manner of their mistress's death and showed him up into her room. Aunt Lispeth had been laid out daintily. Ralph contemplated her with the smile which never moved from his cheeks and with a sort of awe in his thirsty eyes. The poor old girl! How thin, how white! It had been time she went! A little stiffened twist in her neck where her lean head had fallen to one side at the last had not been set quite straight, and there seemed the ghost of an expression on her face, almost cynical; by looking closer he saw that it came from a gap in the white lashes of one eye, giving it an air of not being quite closed, as though she were trying to wink at him. He went out rather hastily, and ascertaining that the funeral was fixed for noon next day, paid a visit to the solicitor.

There he was told that the lawyer himself was sole executor, and he—Ralph—residuary legatee. He could not help a feeling of exultation, for he and Eileen were at that time particularly hard pressed. He restrained it, however, and went to his hotel to write to her. He received a telegram in answer next morning at ten o'clock: "For goodness' sake leave all details to lawyer.—Eileen," which he thought very peculiar. He lunched with the lawyer after the funeral, and

they opened his aunt's will. It was quite short and simple, made certain specific bequests of lace and jewellery, left a hundred pounds to her executor, the lawyer, and the rest of her property to her nephew, Ralph Wotchett. The lawyer proposed to advertise for debts in the usual way, and Ralph, with considerable control, confined himself to urging all speed in the application for probate and disposal of the estate. He caught a late train back to Eileen. She received his account distrustfully; she was sure he had put his finger in the pie, and if he had it would all go wrong. Well, if he hadn't, he soon would! It was really as if loyalty had given way in her now that their expectations were on the point of being realised.

They had often discussed his aunt's income, but they went into it again that night, to see whether it could not by fresh investment be increased. It was derived from Norwich and Birmingham Corporation Stocks, and Ralph proved that by going into industrial concerns the four hundred a year could quite safely be made into six. Eileen agreed that this would be a good thing to do, but nothing definite was decided. Now that they had come into money they did not feel so inclined to move their residence, though both felt that they might increase their scale of living, which had lately been at a distressingly low ebb.

They spoke, too, about the advisability of a small car. Ralph knew of one—a second-hand Ford—to be had for a song. They ought not—he thought—to miss the chance. He would take occasion to meet the owner casually and throw out a feeler. It would not do to let the fellow know that there was any money coming to them, or he would put the price up for a certainty. In fact, it would be better to secure the car before the news got about. He secured it a few days later for eighty pounds, including repairs, which would take about a month. A letter from the lawyer next day informed them that he was attending to matters with all speed; and the next five weeks passed in slowly realising that at last they had turned the corner of their lives and were in smooth water. They ordered, among other things, the materials for a fowl-house, long desired, which Ralph helped to put up; and a considerable number of fowls, for feeding which he had a design which would enable them to lay a great many more eggs in the future than could reasonably be expected from the amount of food put into the fowls. He also caused an old stable to be converted into a garage. He still went to London two or three times a week, to attend to business which was not, as a rule, there. On his way from St. Pancras to Red Lion Square, where his office

was, he had long been attracted by an emerald pendant with pearl clasp in a jeweller's shop window. He went in now to ask its price. Fifty-eight pounds—emeralds were a rising market. The expression rankled in him, and going to Hatton Garden to enquire into its truth, he found the statement confirmed. 'The chief advantage of having money,' he thought, 'is to be able to buy at the right moment.' He had not given Eileen anything for a long time, and this was an occasion which could hardly be passed over. He bought the pendant on his way back to St. Pancras, the draft in payment absorbing practically all his balance. Eileen was delighted with it. They spent that evening in the nearest approach to festivity that they had known for several years. It was, as it were, the crown of the long waiting for something out of nothing. All those little acerbities which creep into the manner of two married people who are always trying to round the corner fell away, and they sat together in one large chair, talking and laughing over the countless tricks which Providence—"that fat chough" —had played them. They carried their lightheartedness to bed.

They were awakened next morning by the sound of a car. The Ford was being delivered with a request for payment. Ralph did not pay; it

would be "all right" he said. He stabled the car and wrote to the lawyer that he would be glad to have news and an advance of £100. On his return from town in the evening two days later he found Eileen in the dining-room with her hair wild and an opened letter before her. She looked up with the word: "Here!" and Ralph took the letter.

"Lodgers & Wayburn, Solicitors, Ipswich.

"Dear Mr. Wotchett,—In answer to yours of the fifteenth, I have obtained probate, paid all debts, and distributed the various legacies. The sale of furniture took place last Monday. I now have pleasure in enclosing you a complete and, I think, final account, by which you will see that there is a sum in hand of £43 due to you as residuary legatee. I am afraid this will seem a disappointing result, but as you were doubtless aware (though I was not when I had the pleasure of seeing you,) the greater part of your aunt's property passed under a deed of settlement, and it seems she had been dipping heavily into the capital of the remainder for some years past.

"Believe me,

"Faithfully yours,

"Edward Lodgers."

For a minute the only sounds were the snap-

ping of Ralph's jaws and Eileen's rapid breathing. Then she said:

"You never said a word about a settlement. I suppose you got it muddled as usual!"

Ralph did not answer, too deep in his anger with the old woman who had left that "fat chough" a hundred pounds to provide him—Ralph—with forty-three.

"You always believe what you want to believe!" cried Eileen; "I never saw such a man."

Ralph went to Ipswich on the morrow. After going into everything with the lawyer, he succeeded in varying the account by fifteen shillings, considerably more than which was absorbed by the fee for this interview, his fare, and hotel bill. The conduct of his aunt, in having caused him to get it into his head that there was no settlement, and in living on her capital, gave him pain quite beyond the power of expression; and more than once he recalled with a shudder that slightly quizzical look on her dead face. He returned to Eileen the following day with his brain racing round and round. Getting up next morning, he said:

"I believe I can get a hundred for that car; I'll go up and see about it."

"Take this, too," said Eileen, handing him the emerald pendant. Ralph took it with a grunt.

"Lucky," he muttered; "emeralds are a rising market. I bought it on purpose."

He came back that night more cheerful. He had sold the car for £65, and the pendant for £42—a good price, for emeralds were now on the fall! With the cheque for £43, which represented his expectations, he proved that they would only be £14 out on the whole business when the fowls and fowl-house had been paid for; and they would have the fowls—the price of eggs was going up. Eileen agreed that it was the moment to develop poultry-keeping. They might expect good returns. And holding up her face she said:

"Give me a kiss, dear Ralph!"

Ralph gave it, with his thirsty eyes fixed, expectant, on something round the corner of her head, and the smile, which never moved, on his cheeks.

After all, there was her reversion! They would come into it some day.

1919.

XXVIII

MANNA

I

THE Petty Sessions Court at Linstowe was crowded. Miracles do not happen every day, nor are rectors frequently charged with larceny. The interest roused would have relieved all those who doubt the vitality of our ancient church. People who never went outside their farms or plots of garden had walked as much as three miles to see the show. Mrs. Gloyn, the sandy-haired little keeper of the shop where soap and herrings, cheese, matches, boot-laces, bulls'-eyes, and the other luxuries of a countryside could be procured, remarked to Mrs. Redland, the farmer's wife, "'Tis quite a gatherin', like." To which Mrs. Redland replied, "'Most like church of a Sunday."

More women, it is true, than men were present, because of their greater piety, and because most of them had parted with pounds of butter, chickens, ducks, potatoes, or some such offertory in kind during the past two years, at the instance of

the rector. They had a vested interest in this matter, and were present, accompanied by their grief at value unreceived. From Trover, their little village on the top of the hill two miles from Linstowe, with the squat church-tower, beautifully untouched, and the body of the building ruined by perfect restoration, they had trooped in; some even coming from the shore of the Atlantic, a smile beyond, across the downs, whence other upland square church-towers could be viewed on the sky-line against the grey January heavens. The occasion was in a sense unique, and its piquancy strengthened by that rivalry which is the essence of religion.

For there was no love lost between church and chapel in Trover, and the rector's flock had long been fortified in their power of "parting" by fear lest "chapel" (also present that day in court) should mock at his impecuniosity. Not that his flock approved of his poverty. It had seemed "silly-like" ever since the news had spread that his difficulties had been caused by a faith in shares. To improve a secure if moderate position by speculation would not have seemed wrong if he had succeeded, but failure had made him dependent on their butter, their potatoes, their eggs and chickens. In that parish, as in others, the saying "Nothing succeeds like success" was true,

nor had the villagers any abnormal disposition to question the title-deeds of affluence.

But it is equally true that nothing irritates so much as finding that one of whom you have the right to beg is begging of you. This was why the rector's tall, thin, black figure, down which a ramrod surely had been passed at birth; his narrow, hairless, white and wasted face, with red eyebrows over eyes that seemed now burning and now melting; his grizzled red hair under a hat almost green with age; his abrupt and dictatorial voice; his abrupt and mirthless laugh—all were on their nerves. His barked-out utterances, "I want a pound of butter—pay you Monday!" "I want some potatoes—pay you soon!" had sounded too often in the ears of those who had found his repayments so far purely spiritual. Now and then one of the more cynical would remark, "Ah! I told un *my* butter was all to market." Or, "The man can't 'ave no principles—he didn't get no chicken out o' me." And yet it was impossible to let him and his old mother die on them—it would give too much pleasure "over the way." And they never dreamed of losing him in any other manner, because they knew his living had been purchased. Money had passed in that transaction; the whole fabric of the Church and of society was involved. His professional conduct, too.

was flawless; his sermons long and fiery; he was always ready to perform those supernumerary duties—weddings, baptisms, and burials—which yielded him what revenue he had, now that his income from the living was mortgaged up to the hilt. Their loyalty held as the loyalty of people will when some great institution of which they are members is endangered.

Gossip said that things were in a dreadful way at the Rectory; the external prosperity of that red-brick building surrounded by laurels which did not flower, heightened ironically the conditions within. The old lady, his mother, eighty years of age, was reported never to leave her bed this winter, because they had no coal. She lay there, with her three birds flying about dirtying the room, for neither she nor her son would ever let a cage-door be shut—deplorable state of things! The one servant was supposed never to be paid. The tradesmen would no longer leave goods because they could not get their money. Most of the furniture had been sold; and the dust made you sneeze "fit to bust yourself, like."

With a little basket on his arm the rector collected for his household three times a week, pursuing a kind of method, always in the apparent belief that he would pay on Monday, and observing the Sabbath as a day of rest. His mind

seemed ever to cherish the faith that his shares were on the point of recovery; his spirit never to lose belief in his divine right to be supported. It was extremely difficult to refuse him; the postman had twice seen him standing on the railway line that ran past just below the village, "with 'is 'at off, as if he was in two minds—like!" This vision of him close to the shining metals had powerfully impressed many good souls who loved to make flesh creep. They would say, "I wouldn' never be surprised if someat 'appened to 'im one of these days!" Others, less romantic, shook their heads, insisting that "he wouldn' never do nothin' while his old mother lived." Others again, more devout, maintained that "he wouldn' never go against the scriptures, settin' an example like that!"

II

The Petty Sessions Court that morning resembled church on the occasion of a wedding, for the villagers of Trover had put on their black clothes and grouped themselves according to their religious faiths—"Church" in the right, "Chapel" in the left-hand aisle. They presented all that rich variety of type and monotony of costume which the remoter country still affords to the observer; their mouths were almost all a little open

and their eyes fixed with intensity on the Bench. The three magistrates—Squire Pleydell in the chair, Dr. Becket on his left, and "the Honble" Calmady on his right—were by most seen for the first time in their judicial capacity; and curiosity was divided between their proceedings and observation of the rector's prosecutor, a small baker from the town whence the village of Trover derived its necessaries. The face of this fellow, like that of a white walrus, and the back of his bald head were of interest to every one until the case was called and the rector himself entered. In his thin black overcoat he advanced and stood as if a little dazed. Then, turning his ravaged face to the Bench, he jerked out—

"Good morning! Lot of people!"

A constable behind him murmured—

"Into the dock, sir, please."

Moving across, he entered the wooden edifice.

"Quite like a pulpit," he said, and uttered his barking laugh.

Through the court ran a stir and shuffle, as it might be of sympathy with his lost divinity, and every eye was fixed on that tall, lean figure, with the red, grey-streaked hair.

Entering the witness-box, the prosecutor deposed as follows:—

"Last Tuesday afternoon, your Honours, I

'appened to be drivin' my cart meself up through Trover on to the cottages just above the dip, and I'd gone in to Mrs. 'Oney's, the laundress, leavin' my cart standin', same as I always do. I 'ad a bit o' gossip, an' when I come out, I see this gentleman walkin' away in front towards the village street. It so 'appens I 'appened to look in the back o' my cart, and I thinks to meself: 'That's funny! There's only two flat rounds—'ave I left two 'ere by mistake?' I calls to Mrs. 'Oney an' I says, 'I 'aven't been absent, 'ave I, an' left ye two?' 'No,' she says, 'only one—'ere 'tis! Why?' she says. 'Well,' I says, 'I 'ad four when I come in to you; there's only two now. 'Tis funny!' I says. ''Ave you dropped one?' she says. 'No,' I says, 'I counted 'em.' 'That's funny,' she says; 'perhaps a dog's 'ad it.' ''E may 'ave,' I says, 'but the only thing I see on the road is that there.' An' I pointed to this gentleman. 'Oh!' she says, 'that's the rector.' 'Yes,' I says, 'I ought to know that, seein' 'e's owed me money a matter of eighteen months. I think I'll drive on,' I says. Well, I drove on, and come up to this gentleman. 'E turns 'is 'ead and looks at me. 'Good afternoon!' he says—like that. 'Good afternoon, sir,' I says. 'You 'aven't seen a loaf, 'ave you?' 'E pulls the loaf out of 'is pocket. 'On the ground,' 'e says; 'dirty,' 'e says. 'Do for my birds! Ha!

ha!' like that. 'Oh!' I says, 'indeed! Now I know!' I says. I kept my 'ead, but I thinks: 'That's a bit too light-'earted. You owes me one pound, eight and tuppence; I've whistled for it gettin' on for two years, but you ain't content with that, it seems! Very well,' I thinks; 'we'll see. An' I don't give a darn whether you're a parson or not!' I charge 'im with takin' my bread."

Passing a dirty handkerchief over his white face and huge gingery moustache, the baker was silent. Suddenly from the dock the rector called out: "Bit of dirty bread—feed my birds. Ha, ha!"

There was a deathly little silence. Then the baker said slowly:

"What's more, I say he ate it 'imself. I call two witnesses to that."

The chairman, passing his hand over his hard, alert face, that of a master of hounds, asked:

"Did you see any dirt on the loaf? Be careful!"

The baker answered stolidly:

"Not a speck."

Dr. Becket, a slight man with a short grey beard and eyes restive from having to notice painful things, spoke:

"Had your horse moved?"

"'E never moves."

"Ha, ha!" came the rector's laugh.

The chairman said sharply:

"Well, stand down; call the next witness—Charles Stodder, carpenter. Very well! Go on, and tell us what you know."

But before he could speak the rector called out in a loud voice, "Chapel!"

"Hsssh! sir!" But through the body of the court had passed a murmur of challenge, as it were, from one aisle to the other.

The witness, a square man with a red face, grey hair, whiskers, and moustache, and lively, excitable, dark eyes, watering with anxiety, spoke in a fast, soft voice.

"Tuesday afternoon, your worships, it might be about four o'clock, I was passin' up the village, an' I saw the rector at his gate with a loaf in 'is 'and."

"Show us how."

The witness held his black hat to his side, with the rounded top outwards.

"Was the loaf clean or dirty?"

Sweetening his little eyes, the witness answered:

"I should say 'twas clean."

"Lie!"

The chairman said sternly:

"You mustn't interrupt, sir. You didn't see the bottom of the loaf?"

The witness's little eyes snapped.

"Not eggzactly."

"Did the rector speak to you?"

The witness smiled. "The rector wouldn' never stop me if I was passin'. I collects the rates."

The rector's laugh, so like a desolate dog's bark, killed the bubble of gaiety rising in the court; and again that deathly little silence followed:

Then the chairman said:

"Do you want to ask him anything?"

The rector turned. "Why d'you tell lies?"

The witness, screwing up his eyes, said excitedly:

"What lies 'ave I told, please?"

"You said the loaf was clean."

"So 'twas clean, so far as I see."

"Come to church and you won't tell lies."

"Reckon I can learn truth faster in chapel."

The chairman rapped his desk.

"That'll do, that'll do! Stand down! Next witness—Emily Bleaker. Yes? What are you? Cook at the rectory? Very well. What do you know about the affair of this loaf last Tuesday afternoon?"

The witness, a broad-faced, brown-eyed girl, answered stolidly, "Nothin', zurr."

"Ha, ha!"

"Hssh! Did you see the loaf?"

"Noa."

"What are you here for, then?"

"Master asked for a plate and a knaife. He an' old missus ate et for dinner. I see the plate after; there wasn't on'y crumbs on et."

"If you never saw the loaf, how do you know they ate it?"

"Because ther' warn't nothin' else in the 'ouse."

The rector's voice barked out:

"Quite right!"

The chairman looked at him fixedly.

"Do you want to ask her anything?"

The rector nodded.

"You been paid your wages?"

"Noa, I 'asn't."

"D'you know why?"

"Noa."

"Very sorry—no money to pay you. That' all."

This closed the prosecutor's case and there followed a pause, during which the Bench consulted together and the rector eyed the congregation, nodding to one here and there. Then the chairman, turning to him, said:

"Now, sir, do you call any witnesses?"

"Yes. My bell-ringer. He's a good man. You can believe him."

The bell-ringer, Samuel Bevis, who took his place in the witness-box, was a kind of elderly Bacchus, with permanently trembling hands. He deposed as follows:—

"When I passed rector Tuesday arternoon, he calls after me: 'See this!' 'e says, and up 'e held it. 'Bit o' dirrty bread,' 'e says; 'do for my burrds.' Then on he goes walkin'."

"Did you see whether the loaf was dirty?"

"Yaas, I think 'twas dirrty."

"Don't *think!* Do you *know?*"

"Yaas; 'twas dirrty."

"Which side?"

"Which saide? I think 'twas dirrty on the bottom."

"Are you sure?"

"Yaas; 'twas dirrty on the bottom, for zartain."

"Very well. Stand down. Now, sir, will you give us your version of this matter?"

The rector, pointing at the prosecutor and the left-hand aisle, jerked out the words:

"All chapel—want to see me down."

The chairman said stonily:

"Never mind that. Come to the facts, please."

"Certainly! Out for a walk—passed the baker's cart—saw a loaf fallen in the mud—picked it up—do for my birds."

"What birds?"

"Magpie and two starlings; quite free—never shut the cage door; well fed."

"The baker charges you with taking it from his cart."

"Lie! Underneath the cart in a puddle."

"You heard what your cook said about your eating it. Did you?"

"Yes, birds couldn't eat all—nothing in the house—mother and I—hungry."

"Hungry?"

"No money. Hard up—very! Often hungry. Ha, ha!"

Again through the court that queer rustle passed. The three magistrates gazed at the accused. Then "the Honble" Calmady said:

"You say you found the loaf under the cart. Didn't it occur to you to put it back? You could see it had fallen. How else could it have come there?"

The rector's burning eyes seemed to melt.

"From the sky—manna." Staring round the court, he added, "Hungry—God's elect—to the manna born!" And, throwing back his head, he laughed. It was the only sound in a silence as of the grave.

The magistrates spoke together in low tones. The rector stood motionless, gazing at them fix-

edly. The people in the court sat as if at a play. Then the chairman said:

"Case dismissed."

"Thank you."

Jerking out that short thanksgiving, the rector descended from the dock and passed down the centre aisle, followed by every eye.

III

From the Petty Sessions Court the congregation wended its way back to Trover, by the muddy lane, "Church" and "Chapel," arguing the case. To dim the triumph of the "Church" the fact remained that the baker had lost his loaf and had not been compensated. The loaf was worth money; no money had passed. It was hard to be victorious and yet reduced to silence and dark looks at girding adversaries. The nearer they came to home the more angry with "Chapel" did they grow. Then the bell-ringer had his inspiration. Assembling his three assistants, he hurried to the belfry, and in two minutes the little old tower was belching forth the merriest and maddest peal those bells had ever furnished. Out it swung in the still air of the grey winter day, away to the very sea.

A stranger, issuing from the inn, hearing that

triumphant sound, and seeing so many black-clothed people about, said to his driver:

"What is it—a wedding?"

"No, zurr, they say 'tis for the rector, like; he've a just been acquitted for larceny."

On the Tuesday following, the rector's ravaged hairless face appeared in Mrs. Gloyn's doorway, and his voice, creaking like a saw, said:

"Can you let me have a pound of butter? Pay you soon."

What else could he do? Not even to God's elect does the sky always send down manna.

1916.

XXIX

A STRANGE THING

NOT very long ago, during a sojourn in a part of the West Country never yet visited by me, I went out one fine but rather cold March morning for a long ramble. I was in one of those disillusioned moods which come to writers bankrupt of ideas, bankrupt of confidence, a prey to that recurrent despair, the struggle with which makes the profession of the pen—as a friend once said to me—"a manly one." 'Yes,' I was thinking, for all that the air was so brisk, and the sun so bright, 'nothing comes to me nowadays, no flashes of light, none of those suddenly shaped visions that bring cheer and warmth to a poor devil's heart, and set his brain and pen to driving on. A bad business!' And my eyes, wandering over the dip and rise, the woods, the moor, the rocks of that fine countryside, took in the loveliness thereof with the profound discontent of one who, seeing beauty, feels that he cannot render it. The high lane-banks had just been pollarded, one could see right down over the

fields and gorse and bare woods tinged with that rosy brown of beech and birch twigs, and the dusty saffron of the larches. And suddenly my glance was arrested by something vivid, a sort of black and white excitement in the air. 'Aha!' I thought, 'a magpie. Two! Three! Good! Is it an omen?' The birds had risen at the bottom of a field, their twining, fluttering voyage—most decorative of all bird flights—was soon lost in the wood beyond, but something it had left behind—in my heart; I felt more hopeful, less inclined to think about the failure of my spirit, better able to give myself up to this new country I was passing through. Over the next rise in the very winding lane I heard the sound of brisk church bells, and not three hundred yards beyond came to a village green, where knots of men dressed in the dark clothes, light ties and bowler hats of village festivity, and of women smartened up beyond belief, were gathered, chattering, round the yard of an old, grey, square-towered church.

'What's going on?' I thought. 'It's not Sunday, not the birthday of a potentate, and surely they don't keep saint days in this manner. It must be a wedding. Yes—there's a favour! Let's go in and see!' And, passing the expectant groups, I entered the church and made my way up the aisle. There was already a fair sprinkling

of folk all turned round towards the door, and the usual licensed buzz and whisper of a wedding congregation. The church, as seems usual in remote parishes, had been built all those centuries ago to hold a population in accordance with the expectations of its tenet, "Be fruitful and multiply." But the whole population could have been seated in a quarter of its space. It was lofty and unwarmed save by excitement and the smell of bear's-grease. There was certainly more animation than I had ever seen or savoured in a truly rural district.

The bells, which had been ringing with a sort of languid joviality, fell now into the hurried crashing which marks the approach of a bride, and the people I had passed outside came thronging in. I perceived a young man—little more than a boy—who by his semi-detachment, the fumbling of his gloved hands, and the sheepishness of the smile on his good-looking, open face, was obviously the bridegroom. I liked the looks of him—a cut above the usual village bumpkin—something free and kind about his face. But no one was paying him the least attention. It was for the bride they were waiting; and I myself began to be excited. What would this young thing be like? Just the ordinary village maiden with tight cheeks and dress, coarse veil, high colour, and eyes like a rabbit's;

or something—something like that little Welsh girl on the hills whom I once passed and whose peer I have never since seen? Bending forward, I accosted an apple-faced woman in the next pew. "Can you tell me who the bride is?"

Regarding me with the grey, round, defensive glance that one bestows on strangers, she replied:

"Aw, don't 'ee know? 'Tes Gwenny Mara—prettiest, brightest maid in these parts." And jerking her thumb towards the neglected bridegroom, she added: "He's a lucky young chap. She'm a sunny maid, for sure, and a gude maid, tu."

Somehow the description did not reassure me, and I prepared for the worst.

A bubble, a stir, a rustle!

Like every one else, I turned frankly round. She was coming up the aisle on the arm of a hard-faced, rather gipsy-looking man dressed in a farmer's very best.

I can only tell you that to see her coming down the centre of that grey church amongst all those dark-clothed people was like watching the dance of a sunbeam. Never had I seen a face so happy, sweet, and radiant. Smiling, eager, just lost enough to her surroundings, her hair unconquerably golden through the coarse veil; her dancing eyes clear and dark as a peat pool—she was the

prettiest sight. One could only think of a young apple tree with the spring sun on its blossom. She had that kind of infectious brightness which comes from very simple goodness. It was quite a relief to have taken a fancy to the young man's face and to feel that she was passing into good hands.

The only flowers in the church were early daffodils, but those first children of the sun were somehow extraordinarily appropriate to the wedding of this girl. When she came out she was pelted with them, and with that miserable confetti, without which not even the simplest souls can pass to bliss, it seems. There are things in life which make one feel good—sunshine, most music, all flowers, many children, some animals, clouds, mountains, bird-songs, blue sky, dancing, and here and there a young girl's face. And I had the feeling that all of us there felt good for the mere seeing of her.

When she had driven away, I found myself beside a lame old man with whiskers and delightful eyes, who continued to smile after the carriage had quite vanished. Noticing, perhaps, that I, too, was smiling, he said: "'Tes a funny thing, tu, when a maid like that gets married—makes you go all of a tremble—so it du." And to my nod he added: "Brave bit o' sunshine—we'll miss her

hereabout; not a doubt of it. We ain't got another one like that."

"Was that her father?" I asked, for the want of something to say. With a sharpish look at my face, he shook his head.

"No, she an't got no parents, Mr. Mara bein' her uncle, as you may say. No, she an't got no parents," he repeated, and there was something ill at ease, yet juicy, about his voice, as though he knew things that he would not tell.

Since there was nothing more to wait for, I went up to the little inn and ordered bread and cheese. The male congregation was wetting its whistle noisily within, but, as a stranger, I had the verandah to myself, and, finishing my simple lunch in the March sunlight, I paid and started on. Taking at random one of the three lanes which debouched from the bottom of the green, I meandered on between high banks, happy in the consciousness of not knowing at all where it would lead me—that essential of a country ramble. Except one cottage in a bottom and one farm on a rise, I passed nothing, nobody. The spring was late in these parts, the buds had hardly formed as yet on any trees, and now and then between the bursts of sunlight a few fine specks of snow would come drifting past me on the wind. Close to a group of pines at a high cor-

ner the lane dipped sharply down to a long farmhouse standing back in its yard, where three carts were drawn up and an empty waggonette with its shafts in the air. And suddenly, by some broken daffodils on the seats and confetti on the ground, I perceived that I had stumbled on the bride's home, where the wedding feast was, no doubt, in progress.

Gratifying but by no means satisfying my curiosity by gazing at the lichened stone and thatch of the old house, at the pigeons, pigs, and hens at large between it and the barns, I passed on down the lane, which turned up steeply to the right beside a little stream. To my left was a long larch wood, to my right rough fields with many trees. The lane finished at a gate below the steep moorside crowned by a rocky tor. I stood there leaning on the top bar, debating whether I should ascend or no. The bracken had, most of it, been cut in the autumn, and not a hundred yards away the furze was being swaled; the little blood-red flames and the blue smoke, the yellow blossoms of the gorse, the sunlight, and some flecks of drifting snow were mingled in an amazing tangle of colour.

I had made up my mind to ascend the tor and was pushing through the gate, when suddenly I saw a woman sitting on a stone under the wall bordering the larch wood. She was holding her

head in her hands, rocking her body to and fro, and her eyes were evidently shut, for she had not noticed me. She wore a blue serge dress, her hat reposed beside her, and her dark hair was straggling about her face. That face, all blowsy and flushed, was at once wild and stupefied. A face which has been beautiful, coarsened and swollen by life and strong emotion, is a pitiful enough sight. Her dress, hat, and the way her hair had been done were redolent of the town, and of that unnameable something which clings to women whose business it is to attract men. And yet there was a gipsyish look about her, as though she had not always been of the town.

The sight of a woman's unrestrained distress in the very heart of untouched nature is so rare that one must be peculiar to remain unmoved. And there I stood, not knowing what on earth to do. She went on rocking herself to and fro, her stays creaking, and a faint moaning sound coming from her lips; and suddenly she drooped over her lap, her hands fallen to her sides, as though she had gone into a kind of coma. How go on and leave her thus? Yet how intrude on what did not seem to me mere physical suffering?

In that quandary I stood and watched. This corner was quite sheltered from the wind, the sun almost hot, and the breath of the swaling reached

one in the momentary calms. For three full minutes she had not moved a finger, till, beginning to think she had really fainted, I went up to her. From her drooped body came a scent of heat and of stale violet powder, and I could see, though the east wind had outraddled them, traces of rouge on her cheeks; their surface had a sort of swollen defiance, but underneath, as it were, a wasted look. Her breathing sounded faint and broken.

Mustering courage, I touched her on the arm. She raised her head and looked up. Her eyes were the best things she had left; they must have once been very beautiful. Bloodshot now from the wind, their wild, stupefied look passed after a moment into the peculiar, half-bold, half-furtive stare of women of a certain sort. She did not speak, and in my embarrassment I drew out the flask of port I always take with me on my rambles, and stammered:

"I beg your pardon—are you feeling faint? Would you care——?" And, unscrewing the top, I held out the flask. She stared at it a moment blankly, then taking it, said:

"That's kind of you. I feel to want it, tu." And, putting it to her lips, she drank, tilting back her head. Perhaps it was the tell-tale softness of her u's, perhaps the naturally strong lines of her figure thus bent back, but somehow the plumage of

the town bird seemed to drop off her suddenly.

She handed back the flask, as empty as it had ever been, and said, with a hard smile:

"I daresay you thought me funny sittin' 'ere like that."

"I thought you were ill."

She laughed without the faintest mirth, and muttered:

"I did go on, didn't I?" Then, almost fiercely, added: "I got some reason, too. Seein' the old place again after all these years." Her dark eyes, which the wine seemed to have cleared and boldened, swept me up and down, taking me in, making sure, perhaps, whether or no she had ever seen me, and what sort of a brute I might be. Then she said: "I was born here. Are you from these parts?" I shook my head—"No, from the other side of the county."

She laughed. Then, after a moment's silence, said abruptly:

"I been to a weddin'—first I've seen since I was a girl."

Some instinct kept me silent.

"My own daughter's weddin', but nobody didn't know me—not likely."

I had dropped down under the shelter of the wall on to a stone opposite, and at those words looked at her with interest indeed. She—this

coarsened, wasted, suspiciously-scented woman of the town—the mother of that sweet, sunny child I had just seen married? And again instinctively silent about my own presence at the wedding, I murmured:

"I thought I saw some confetti in that farmyard as I came up the lane."

She laughed again.

"Confetti—that's the little pink and white and blue things—plenty o' that"; and she added fiercely: "My own brother didn' know me—let alone my girl. How should she?—I haven't seen her since she was a baby—she was a laughin' little thing;" and she gazed past me with that look in the eyes as of people who are staring back into the bygone. "I guess we was laughin' when we got her. 'Twas just here—summer-time. I 'ad the moon in my blood that night, right enough." Then, turning her eyes on my face, she added: "That's what a girl *will* 'ave, you know, once in a while, and like as not it'll du for her. Only thirty-five now, I am, an' pretty nigh the end o' my tether. What can you expect?—I'm a gay woman. Did for me right enough. Her father's dead, tu."

"Do you mean," I said, "because of your child?"

She nodded. "I suppose you can say that.

They made me bring an order against him. He wouldn't pay up, so he went and enlisted, an' in tu years 'e was dead in the Boer War—so it killed him right enough. But there she is, a sweet sprig if ever there was one. That's a strange thing, isn't it?" And she stared straight before her in a sudden silence. Nor could *I* find anything to say, slowly taking in the strangeness of this thing. That girl, so like a sunbeam, of whom the people talked as though she were a blessing in their lives—her coming into life to have been the ruin of the two who gave her being!

The woman went on dully: "Funny how I knew she was goin' to be married—'twas a farmer told me—comes to me regular when he goes to Exeter market. I always knew he came from near my old home. 'There's a weddin' on Tuesday,' 'e says, 'I'd like to be the bridegroom at. Prettiest, sunniest maid you ever saw;' an' he told me where she come from, so I knew. He found me a bit funny that afternoon. But he don't know who I am, though he used to go to school with me; I'd never tell, not for worlds." She shook her head vehemently. "I don't know why I told you; I'm not meself to-day, and that's a fact." At her half-suspicious, half-appealing look, I said quickly:

"I don't know a soul about here. It's all right."

She sighed. "It was kind of you; and I feel to want to talk sometimes. Well, after he was gone, I said to myself: 'I'll take a holiday and go an' see my daughter married.'" She laughed—"I never had no pink and white and blue little things myself. That was all done up for me that night I had the moon in me blood. Ah! my father was a proper hard man. 'Twas bad enough before I had my baby; but after, when I couldn't get the father to marry me, an' he cut an' run, proper life they led me, him and stepmother. Cry! Didn' I cry—I was a soft-hearted thing—never went to sleep with me eyes dry—never. 'Tis a cruel thing to make a young girl cry."

I said quietly: "Did you run away, then?"

She nodded. "Bravest thing I ever did. Nearly broke my 'eart to leave my baby; but 'twas that or drownin' meself. I was soft then. I went off with a young fellow—bookmaker that used to come over to the sports meetin', wild about me—but he never married me"—again she uttered her hard laugh—"knew a thing worth tu o' that." Lifting her hand towards the burning furze, she added: "I used to come up here an' help 'em light that when I was a little girl." And suddenly she began to cry. It was not so painful and alarming as her first distress, for it seemed natural now.

At the side of the cart-track by the gate was an

old boot thrown away, and it served me for something to keep my eyes engaged. The dilapidated black object among the stones and wild plants on that day of strange mixed beauty was as incongruous as this unhappy woman herself revisiting her youth. And there shot into my mind a vision of this spot as it might have been that summer night when she had "the moon in her blood"—queer phrase—and those two young creatures in the tall soft fern, in the warmth and the darkened loneliness, had yielded to the impulse in their blood. A brisk fluttering of snowflakes began falling from the sky still blue, drifting away over our heads towards the blood-red flames and smoke. They powdered the woman's hair and shoulders, and with a sob and a laugh she held up her hand, and began catching them as a child might.

"'Tis a funny day for my girl's weddin'," she said. Then with a sort of fierceness added: "She'll never know her mother—she's in luck there, tu!" And, grabbing her feathered hat from the ground, she got up. "I must be gettin' back for my train, else I'll be late for an appointment."

When she had put her hat on, rubbed her face, dusted and smoothed her dress, she stood looking at the burning furze. Restored to her town plu-

mage, to her wonted bravado, she was more than ever like that old discarded boot, incongruous.

"I'm a fool ever to have come," she said; "only upset me—and you don't want no more upsettin' than you get, that's certain. Good-bye, and thank you for the drink—it lusened my tongue praaper, didn't it?" She gave me a look—not as a professional—but a human, puzzled look. "I told you my baby was a laughin' little thing. I'm glad she's still like that. I'm glad I've seen her." Her lips quivered for a second; then, with a faked jauntiness, she nodded. "So long!" and passed through the gate down into the lane.

I sat there in the snow and sunlight some minutes after she was gone. Then, getting up, I went and stood by the burning furze. The blowing flames and the blue smoke were alive and beautiful; but behind them they were leaving blackened skeleton twigs.

'Yes,' I thought, 'but in a week or two the little green grass-shoots will be pushing up underneath into the sun. So the world goes! Out of destruction! It's a strange thing!'

1916.

XXX

TWO LOOKS

THE old director of the "Yew Trees" Cemetery walked slowly across from his house to see that all was ready.

He had seen pass into the square of earth committed to his charge so many to whom he had been in the habit of nodding, so many whose faces even he had not known. To him it was the everyday event; yet this funeral, one more in the countless tale, disturbed him—a sharp reminder of the passage of time.

For twenty years had gone by since the death of Septimus Godwin, the cynical, romantic doctor who had been his greatest friend; by whose cleverness all had sworn, of whose powers of fascination all had gossiped! And now they were burying his son!

He had not seen the widow since, for she had left the town at once; but he recollected her distinctly, a tall, dark woman with bright brown eyes, much younger than her husband, and only

married to him eighteen months before he died. He remembered her slim figure standing by the grave at that long-past funeral, and the look on her face which had puzzled him so terribly—a look of—a most peculiar look!

He thought of it even now, walking along the narrow path toward his old friend's grave—the handsomest in the cemetery, commanding from the topmost point the whitened slope and river that lay beyond. He came to its little private garden. Spring flowers were blossoming; the railings had been freshly painted; and by the door of the grave wreaths awaited the new arrival. All was in order.

The old director opened the mausoleum with his key. Below, seen through a thick glass floor, lay the shining coffin of the father; beneath, on the lower tier, would rest the coffin of the son.

A gentle voice, close behind him, said:

"Can you tell me, sir, what they are doing to my old doctor's grave?"

The old director turned and saw before him a lady well past middle age. He did not know her face, but it was pleasant, with faded rose-leaf cheeks, and silvered hair under a shady hat.

"Madam, there is a funeral here this afternoon."

"Ah! Can it be his wife?"

"Madam, his son; a young man of only twenty."

"His son! At what time did you say?"

"At two o'clock."

"Thank you; you are very kind."

With uplifted hat he watched her walk away. It worried him to see a face he did not know.

All went off beautifully; but, dining that same evening with his friend, a certain doctor, the old director asked:

"Did you see a lady with grey hair hovering about this afternoon?"

The doctor, a tall man, with a beard still yellow, drew his guest's chair nearer to the fire.

"I did," he answered.

"Did you remark her face? A very odd expression—a sort of—what shall I call it? Very odd indeed! Who is she? I saw her at the grave this morning."

The doctor shook his head.

"Not so very odd, I think."

"Come! What do you mean by that?"

The doctor hesitated. Then, taking the decanter, he filled his old friend's glass, and answered:

"Well, sir, you were Godwin's greatest chum—I will tell you, if you like, the story of his death. You were away at the time, if you remember."

"It is safe with me," said the old director.

"Septimus Godwin," began the doctor slowly, "died on a Thursday about three o'clock, and I was only called in to see him at two. I found him far gone, but conscious now and then. It was a case of—but you know the details, so I needn't go into that. His wife was in the room, and on the bed at his feet lay his pet dog—a terrier; you may recollect, perhaps, he had a special breed. I hadn't been there ten minutes, when a maid came in and whispered something to her mistress. Mrs. Godwin answered angrily, 'See him? Go down and say she ought to know better than to come here at such a time!' The maid went, but soon came back. Could the lady see Mrs. Godwin for just a moment? Mrs. Godwin answered that she could not leave her husband. The maid looked frightened and went away again. She came back for the third time. The lady had said she must see Dr. Godwin; it was a matter of life and death! 'Death—indeed!' exclaimed Mrs. Godwin: 'Shameful! Go down and tell her, if she doesn't go immediately I will send for the police!'"

"The poor maid looked at me. I offered to go down and see the visitor myself. I found her in the dining-room, and knew her at once. Never mind her name, but she belongs to a county family not a hundred miles from here. A beautiful

woman she was then; but her face that day was quite distorted.

"'For God's sake, doctor,' she said, 'is there any hope?'

"I was obliged to tell her there was none.

"'Then I must see him,' she said.

"I begged her to consider what she was asking. But she held me out a signet ring. Just like Godwin—wasn't it—that sort of Byronism, eh!

"'He sent me this,' she said, 'an hour ago. It was agreed between us that if ever he sent that, I must come. If it were only myself I could bear it—a woman can bear anything; but he'll die thinking I wouldn't come, thinking I didn't care—and I would give my life for him this minute!'

"Now, a dying man's request is sacred. I told her she should see him. I made her follow me upstairs and wait outside his room. I promised to let her know if he recovered consciousness. I have never been thanked like that, before or since.

"I went back into the bedroom. He was still unconscious and the terrier whining. In the next room a child was crying—the very same young man we buried to-day. Mrs. Godwin was still standing by the bed.

"'Have you sent her away?'

"I had to say that Godwin really wished to see her. At that she broke out:

"'I won't have her here—the wretch!'

"I begged her to control herself, and remember that her husband was a dying man.

"'But I'm his wife,' she said, and flew out of the room."

The doctor paused, staring at the fire. He shrugged his shoulders, and went on: "I'd have stopped her fury, if I could! A dying man is not the same as the live animal, that he must needs be wrangled over. And suffering's sacred, even to us doctors. I could hear their voices outside. Heaven knows what they said to each other. And there lay Godwin with his white face and his black hair—deathly still—fine-looking fellow he always was! Then I saw that he was coming to! The women had begun again outside—first the wife, sharp and scornful; then the other, hushed and slow. I saw Godwin lift his finger and point it at the door. I went out and said to the woman, 'Dr. Godwin wishes to see you; please control yourself.'

"We went back into the room. The wife followed. But Godwin had lost consciousness again. They sat down, those two, and hid their faces. I can see them now, one on each side of the bed, their eyes covered with their hands, each with her claim on him, all murdered by the other's presence; each with her torn love. H'm! What

they must have suffered, then! And all the time the child crying—the child of one of them that might have been the other's!"

The doctor was silent, and the old director turned towards him his white-bearded, ruddy face, with a look as if he were groping in the dark.

"Just then, I remember," the doctor went on suddenly, "the bells of St. Jude's close by began to peal out for the finish of a wedding. That brought Godwin back to life. He just looked from one woman to the other with a queer, miserable sort of smile, enough to make your heart break. And they both looked at him. The face of the wife—poor thing!—was as bitter hard as a cut stone, but she sat there, without ever stirring a finger. As for the other woman—I couldn't look at her. Godwin beckoned to me; but I couldn't catch his words, the bells drowned them. A minute later he was dead.

"Life's a funny thing! You wake in the morning with your foot firm on the ladder—one touch, and down you go! You snuff out like a candle. And it's lucky when your flame goes out if only one woman's flame goes out too.

"Neither of those women cried. The wife stayed there by the bed. I got the other one away to her carriage, down the street. And so she was

there to-day! That explains, I think, the look you saw."

The doctor ceased; and in silence the old director nodded. Yes! That explained the look he had seen on the face of that unknown woman, the deep, unseizable, weird look. That explained the look he had seen on the wife's face at the funeral twenty years ago!

And peering wistfully, he said:

"They looked—they looked—almost triumphant!"

Then, slowly, he rubbed his hands over his knees, with the secret craving of the old for warmth.

1904.

XXXI

THE NIGHTMARE CHILD

SET down here not precisely the words of my friend, the country doctor, but the spirit of them:

"You know there are certain creatures in this world whom one simply dare not take notice of, however sorry one may be for them. That has often been borne in on me. I realised it, I think, before I met that little girl. I used to attend her mother for varicose veins—one of those women who really ought not to have children, since they haven't the very least notion of how to bring them up. The wife of a Sussex agricultural labourer called Alliner, she was a stout person, with most peculiar prominent epileptic eyes, such eyes as one usually associates with men of letters or criminals. And yet there was nothing in her. She was just a lazy, slatternly, easy-going body, rather given to drink. Her husband was a thin, dirty, light-hearted fellow, who did his work and offended nobody. Her eldest daughter, a pretty and capable girl, was wild, got into various kinds of trouble, and had to migrate,

leaving two illegitimate children behind her with their grandparents. The younger girl, the child of this story, who was called Emmeline, of all names —pronounced Em'leen, of course—was just fifteen at the time of my visits to her mother. She had eyes like a hare's, a mouth which readily fell open, and brown locks caught back from her scared and knobby forehead. She was thin, and walked with her head poked a little forward, and she so manœuvred her legs and long feet, of which one turned in rather and seemed trying to get in front of the other, that there was something clodhopperish in her gait. Once in a way you would see her in curl-papers, and then indeed she was plain, poor child! She seemed to have grown up without ever having had the least attention paid to her. I don't think she was ill-treated—she was simply not treated at all. At school they had been kind enough, but had regarded her as almost deficient. Seeing that her father was paid about fifteen shillings a week, that her mother had no conception of housekeeping, and that there were two babies to be fed, they were, of course, villainously poor, and Em'leen was always draggle-tailed and badly shod. One side of her too-short dress seemed ever to hang lower than the other, her stockings always had one hole at least, and her hats—such queer hats—would

seem about to fly away. I have known her type in the upper classes pass muster as 'eccentric' or 'full of character.' And even in Em'leen there was a sort of smothered natural comeliness, trying pathetically to push through, and never getting a chance. She always had a lost-dog air, and when her big hare's eyes clung on your face it seemed as if she only wanted a sign to make her come trailing at your heels, looking up for a pat or a bit of biscuit.

"She went to work, of course, the moment she left school. Her first place was in a small farm where they took lodgers, and her duties were to do everything, without, of course, knowing how to do anything. She had to leave because she used to take soap and hair-pins, and food that was left over, and was once seen licking a dish. It was just about then that I attended her mother for those veins in her unwieldy legs, and the child was at home, waiting to secure some other fate. It was impossible not to look at that little creature kindly and to speak to her now and then; she would not exactly light up, because her face was not made that way, but she would hang towards you as if you were a magnet, and you had at once the uncomfortable sensation that you might find her clinging, impossible to shake off. If one passed her in the village, too, or coming down from her

blackberrying in the thickets on the Downs—their cottage lay just below the South Downs—one knew that she would be lingering along, looking back till you were out of sight. Somehow one hardly thought of her as a girl at all, she seemed so far from all human hearts, so wandering in a queer lost world of her own, and to imagine of what she could be thinking was as impossible as it is with animals. Once I passed her and her mother dawdling slowly in a lane, then heard the dot-and-go-one footsteps pattering after me, and the childish voice, rather soft and timid, say behind my shoulder: 'Would you please buy some blackberries, sir?' She was almost pretty at that moment, flushed and breathless at having actually spoken to me, but her eyes hanging on my face brought a sort of nightmare feeling at once of being unable to get rid of her.

"Isn't it a cruel thing, when you come to think of it, that there should be born into the world poor creatures—children, dogs, cats, horses—who want badly to love and be loved, and yet whom no one can quite put up with, much less feel affection for!

"Well, what happened to her is what will always happen to such as those, one way or another, in a world where the callous abound; for, however unlovable a woman or girl, she has her

use to a man, just as a dog or a horse has to a master who cares nothing for it.

"Soon after I bought those blackberries I went out to France on military duty. I got my leave a year later and went home. It was late September, very lovely weather, and I took a real holiday walking or lying about up on the Downs, and only coming down at sunset. On one of those days when you really enter heaven, so pure are the lines of the hills, so cool the blue, the green, the chalk-white colouring under the smile of the afternoon sun—I was returning down that same lane, when I came on Em'leen sitting in a gap of the bank, with her dishevelled hat beside her and her chin sunk on her hands. My appearance seemed to drag her out of a heavy dream—her eyes awoke, became startled, rolled furtively; she scrambled up, dropped her little old school curtsey, then, all confused, faced the bank as if she were going to climb it. She was taller, her dress longer, her hair gathered up, and it was very clear what was soon going to happen to her. I walked on in a rage. At her age—barely sixteen even yet! I am a doctor and accustomed to most things, but this particular crime against children of that helpless sort does make my blood boil. Nothing, not even passion to excuse it—who could feel passion for that poor child?—nothing

but the cold, clumsy lust of some young ruffian. Yes, I walked on in a rage, and went straight to her mother's cottage. That wretched woman was incapable of moral indignation, or else the adventures of her elder daughter had exhausted her powers of expression. 'Yes,' she admitted, 'Em'-leen had got herself into trouble too, but she would not tell, she wouldn't say nothin' against nobody. It was a bad business, surely, an' now there would be three o' them, an' Alliner was properly upset, that he was!' That was all there was to be had out of *her*. One felt that she knew or suspected more, but her fingers had been so burned over the elder girl that anything to her was better than a fuss.

"I saw Alliner; he was a decent fellow, though dirty, distressed in his simple, shallow-pated way, and more obviously ignorant than his wife. I spoke to the schoolmistress, a shrewd and kindly married woman.

"Poor Emmeline! Yes, she had noticed. It was very sad and wicked! She hinted, but would not do more than hint, at the son of the miller, but he was back again, fighting in France now, and, after all, her evidence amounted to no more than his reputation with girls. Besides, one is very careful what one says in a country village. I, however, was so angry that I should not have been

careful if I could have got hold of anything at all definite.

"I did not see the child again before my leave was up. The very next news I heard of her was from a newspaper—Emmeline Alliner, sixteen, had been committed for trial for causing the death of her illegitimate child by exposure. I was on the sick list in January, and went home to rest. I had not been there two days before I received a visit from a solicitor of our assize town, who came to ask me if I would give evidence at the girl's trial as to the nature of her home surroundings. I learned from him the details of the lugubrious business. It seems that she had slipped out one bitter afternoon in December, barely a fortnight after her confinement, carrying her baby. There was snow on the ground and it was freezing hard, but the sun was bright, and it was that, perhaps, which tempted her. She must have gone up towards the Downs by the lane where I had twice met her; gone up, and stopped at the very gap in the bank where she had been sitting lost in that heavy dream when I saw her last. She appears to have subsided there in the snow, for there she was found by the postman just as it was getting dark; leaning over her knees as if stupefied, with her chin buried in her hands—and the baby stiff and dead in the snow beside her. When I told the

lawyer how I had seen her there ten weeks before, and of the curious dazed state she had been in, he said at once: 'Ah! the exact spot! That's very important; it looks uncommonly as if it were there that she came by her misfortune. What do you think? It's almost evidence that she'd lost sense of her surroundings, baby and all. I shall ask you to tell us about that at the trial. She's a most peculiar child; I can't get anything out of her. I keep asking her for the name of the man, or some indication of how it came about, but all she says is; "Nobody—nobody!" Another case of immaculate conception! Poor little creature! She's very pathetic, and that's her best chance. Who could condemn a child like that?'

"And so, indeed, it turned out. I spared no feelings in my evidence. The mother and father were in court, and I hope Mrs. Alliner liked my diagnosis of her maternal qualities. My description of how Em'leen was sitting when I met her in September tallied so exactly with the postman's account of how he met her that I could see the jury were impressed. And then there was the figure of the child herself, lonely there in the dock. The French have a word, *bébétée*. Surely there never was a human object to which it applied better. She stood like a little tired pony, whose head hangs down, half-sleeping after exertion;

and those hare eyes of hers were glued to the judge's face, for all the world as if she were worshipping him. It must have made him extraordinarily uncomfortable. He summed up very humanely, dwelling on the necessity of finding intention in her conduct towards the baby; and he used some good strong language against the unknown man. The jury found her not guilty, and she was discharged. The schoolmistress and I, anticipating this, had found her a refuge with some sisters of mercy who ran a sort of home not far away, and to that we took her, without a 'by your leave' to the mother.

"When I came home the following summer I found an opportunity of going to look her up. She was amazingly improved in face and dress, but she had attached herself to one of the sisters—a broad, fine-looking woman—to such a pitch that she seemed hardly alive when out of her sight. The sister spoke of it to me with real concern.

"'I really don't know what to do with her,' she said; 'she seems incapable of anything unless I tell her; she only feels things through me. It's really quite trying, and sometimes very funny, poor little soul! but it's tragic for her. If I told her to jump out of her bedroom window, or lie down in that pond and drown, she'd do it without a moment's hesitation. She can't go through life

like this; she must learn to stand on her own feet. We must try and get her a good place, where she can learn what responsibility means and get a will of her own.'

"I looked at the sister, so broad, so capable, so handsome, and so puzzled, and I thought, 'Yes, I know exactly. She's on your nerves; and where in the world will you find a place for her where she won't become a sort of nightmare to some one with her devotion, or else get it taken advantage of again?' And I urged them to keep her a little longer. They did; for when I went home for good, six months later, I found that she had only just gone into a place with an old lady patient of mine in a small villa on the outskirts of our village. She used to open the door to me when I called there on my rounds once a week. She retained vestiges of the neatness which had been grafted on her by the sister, but her frock was already beginning to sag down on one side and her hair to look ill-treated. The old lady spoke to her with a sort of indulgent impatience, and it was clear that the girl's devotion was not concentrated upon her. I caught myself wondering what would be its next object, never able to help the feeling that if I gave a sign it would be myself. You may be sure I gave no sign. What's the good? I hold the belief that people should not

force themselves to human contacts or relationships which they cannot naturally and without irritation preserve. I've seen these heroic attempts come to grief so often; in fact, I don't think I've ever seen one succeed, not even between blood relations. In the long run they merely pervert and spoil the fibre of the attempter without really benefiting the attemptee. Behind healthy relationships between human beings, or even between human beings and animals, there must be at least some rudimentary affinity. That's the tragedy of poor little souls like Em'leen. Where on earth can they find the affinity which makes life good? The very fact that they must worship is their destruction. It was a soldier—or so they said—who had brought her to her first grief; I had seen her adoring the judge at the trial, then the handsome uniformed sister. And I, as the village doctor, was a sort of tin-pot deity in those parts, so I was very careful to keep my manner to her robust and almost brusque.

"And then one day I passed her coming from the post office; she was looking back, her cheeks were flushed, and she was almost pretty. There by the inn a butcher's cart was drawn up. The young butcher, new to our village (he had a stiff knee and had been discharged from the army),

was taking out a leg of mutton. He had a dare-devil face and eyes that had seen much death. He had evidently been chatting with her, for he was still smiling, and even as I passed him he threw her a jerk of the head.

"Two Sundays after that I was coming down past Wiley's copse at dusk and heard a man's coarse laugh. There, through a tiny gap in the nut-bushes, I saw a couple seated. He had his leg stiffly stretched out and his arm round the girl, who was leaning towards him; her lips were parted, and those hare's eyes of hers were looking up into his face. Adoration!

"I don't know what it was my duty to have done, I only know that I did nothing, but slunk on with a lump in my throat.

"Adoration! There it was again! Hopeless! Incurable devotions to those who cared no more for her than for a slice of suet-pudding to be eaten hot, gulped down, forgotten, or loathed in the recollection. And there they are, these girls, one to almost every village of this country—a nightmare to us all. The look on her face was with me all that evening and in my dreams.

"I know no more, for two days later I was summoned north to take up work in a military hospital."

1917.

XXXII

TIMBER

SIR ARTHUR HIRRIES, Baronet, of Hirriehugh, in a northern county, came to the decision to sell his timber in that state of mind—common during the War—which may be called patrio-profiteering. Like newspaper proprietors, writers on strategy, ship-builders, owners of works, makers of arms and the rest of the working classes at large, his mood was: "Let me serve my country, and if thereby my profits are increased, let me put up with it, and invest in National Bonds."

With an encumbered estate and some of the best coverts in that northern county, it had not become practical politics to sell his timber till the Government wanted it at all costs. To let his shooting had been more profitable, till now, when a patriotic action and a stroke of business had become synonymous. A man of sixty-five, but not yet grey, with a reddish tinge in his moustache, cheeks, lips and eyelids, slightly knock-kneed, and with large, rather spreading feet, he moved

in the best circles in a somewhat embarrassed manner. At the enhanced price, the timber at Hirriehugh would enfranchise him for the remainder of his days. He sold it therefore one day of April when the War news was bad, to a Government official on the spot. He sold it at half-past five in the afternoon, practically for cash down, and drank a stiff whisky and soda to wash away the taste of the transaction; for, though no sentimentalist, his great-great-grandfather had planted most of it, and his grandfather the rest. Royalty too had shot there in its time; and he himself (never much of a sportsman) had missed more birds in the rides and hollows of his fine coverts than he cared to remember. But the country was in need, and the price considerable. Bidding the Government official good-bye, he lighted a cigar, and went across the Park to take a farewell stroll among his timber.

He entered the home covert by a path leading through a group of pear trees just coming into bloom. Smoking cigars and drinking whisky in the afternoon in preference to tea, Sir Arthur Hirries had not much sense of natural beauty. But those pear trees impressed him, greenish white against blue sky and fleecy thick clouds which looked as if they had snow in them. They were deuced pretty, and promised a good year

for fruit, if they escaped the late frosts, though it certainly looked like freezing to-night! He paused a moment at the wicket gate to glance back at them—like scantily clothed maidens posing on the outskirts of his timber. Such, however, was not the vision of Sir Arthur Hirries, who was considering how he should invest the balance of the cash down after paying off his mortgages. National Bonds—the country was in need!

Passing through the gate he entered the ride of the home covert. Variety lay like colour on his woods. They stretched for miles, and his ancestors had planted almost every kind of tree, beech, oak, birch, sycamore, ash, elm, hazel, holly, pine; a lime tree and a hornbeam here and there, and further in among the winding coverts, spinneys and belts of larch. The evening air was sharp, and sleet showers came whirling from those bright clouds; he walked briskly, drawing at his richly fragrant cigar, the whisky still warm within him. He walked thinking, with a gentle melancholy slowly turning a little sulky, that he would never again be pointing out with his shooting stick to such or such a guest where he was to stand to get the best birds over him. The pheasants had been let down during the War, but he put up two or three old cocks who went clattering and whirring out to left and right; and rabbits crossed the

rides quietly to and fro, within easy shot. He came to where Royalty had stood fifteen years ago during the last drive. He remembered Royalty saying: "Very pretty shooting at that last stand, Hirries; birds just about as high as I like them." The ground indeed rose rather steeply there, and the timber was oak and ash, with a few dark pines sprinkled into the bare greyish twiggery of the oaks, always costive in Spring, and the just greening feather of the ashes.

'They'll be cutting those pines first,' he thought—strapping trees, straight as the lines of Euclid, and free of branches, save at their tops. In the brisk wind those tops swayed a little and gave forth soft complaint. 'Three times my age,' he thought; 'prime timber.' The ride wound sharply and entered a belt of larch, whose steep rise entirely barred off the rather sinister sunset —a dark and wistful wood, delicate dun and grey, whose green shoots and crimson tips would have perfumed the evening coolness, but for the cigar smoke in his nostrils. 'They'll have this spinney for pit props,' he thought; and, taking a cross ride through it, he emerged in a heathery glen of birch trees. No forester, he wondered if they would make anything of those whitened, glistening shapes. His cigar had gone out now, and he leaned against one of the satin-smooth stems,

under the lacery of twig and bud, sheltering the flame of a re-lighting match. A hare lopped away among the bilberry shoots; a jay, painted like a fan, squawked and flustered past him up the glen. Interested in birds, and wanting just one more jay to complete a fine stuffed group of them, Sir Arthur, though devoid of a gun, followed, to see where "the beggar's" nest was. The glen dipped rapidly, and the character of the timber changed, assuming greater girth and solidity. There was a lot of beech here—a bit he did not know, for though taken in by the beaters, no guns could be stationed there because of the lack of undergrowth. The jay had vanished, and light had begun to fail. 'I must get back,' he thought, 'or I shall be late for dinner.' He debated for a moment whether to retrace his steps, or to cut across the beeches and regain the home covert by a loop. The jay, re-appearing to the left, decided him to cross the beech grove. He did so, and took a narrow ride up through a dark bit of mixed timber with heavy undergrowth. The ride, after favouring the left for a little, bent away to the right; Sir Arthur followed it hurriedly, conscious that twilight was gathering fast. It must bend again to the left in a minute! It did, and then to the right, and, the undergrowth remaining thick, he could only follow on, or else retrace his steps. He

followed on, beginning to get hot in spite of a sleet shower falling through the dusk. He was not framed by Nature for swift travelling—his knees turning in and his toes turning out—but he went at a good bat, uncomfortably aware that the ride was still taking him away from home, and expecting it at any minute to turn left again. It did not, and hot, out of breath, a little bewildered, he stood still in three-quarter darkness, to listen. Not a sound, save that of wind in the tops of the trees, and a faint creaking of timber, where two stems had grown athwart and were touching.

The path was a regular will o' the wisp. He must make a bee line of it through the undergrowth into another ride! He had never before been amongst his timber in the dusk, and he found the shapes of the confounded trees more weird, and as if menacing, than he had ever dreamed of. He stumbled quickly on in and out of them among the undergrowth, without coming to a ride.

'Here I am stuck in this damned wood!' he thought. To call these formidably encircling shapes "a wood" gave him relief. After all, it was *his* wood, and nothing very untoward could happen to a man in his own wood, however dark it might get; he could not be more than a mile and a half at the outside from his dining room! He

looked at his watch, whose hands he could just see—nearly half-past seven! The sleet had become snow, but it hardly fell on him, so thick was the timber just here. But he had no overcoat, and suddenly he felt that first sickening little drop in his chest, which presages alarm. Nobody knew he was in this damned wood! And in a quarter of an hour it would be black as your hat! He *must* get on and out! The trees amongst which he was stumbling produced quite a sick feeling now in one who hitherto had never taken trees seriously. What monstrous growths they were! The thought that seeds, tiny seeds or saplings, planted by his ancestors, could attain such huge impending and imprisoning bulk—ghostly great growths mounting up to heaven and shutting off this world, exasperated and unnerved him. He began to run, caught his foot in a root and fell flat on his face. The cursed trees seemed to have a down on him! Rubbing elbows and forehead with his snow-wetted hands, he leaned against a trunk to get his breath, and summon the sense of direction to his brain. Once as a young man he had been "bushed" at night in Vancouver Island; quite a scary business! But he had come out all right, though his camp had been the only civilised spot within a radius of twenty miles. And here he was, on his own estate, within a mile or two of

home, getting into a funk. It was childish! And he laughed. The wind answered, sighing and threshing in the tree tops. There must be a regular blizzard blowing now, and, to judge by the cold, from the North—but whether north-east or north-west was the question. Besides, how keep definite direction without a compass, in the dark? The timber, too, with its thick trunks, diverted the wind into keen, directionless draughts. He looked up, but could make nothing of the two or three stars that he could see. It was a mess! And he lighted a second cigar with some difficulty, for he had begun to shiver. The wind in this blasted wood cut through his Norfolk jacket and crawled about his body, which had become hot from his exertions, and now felt clammy and half-frozen. This would mean pneumonia, if he didn't look out! And, half feeling his way from trunk to trunk, he started on again, but for all he could tell he might be going round in a circle, might even be crossing rides without realising, and again that sickening drop occurred in his chest. He stood still and shouted. He had the feeling of shouting into walls of timber, dark and heavy, which threw the sound back at him.

'Curse you!' he thought; 'I wish I'd sold you six months ago!' The wind fleered and mowed in the tree tops; and he started off again at a run in

that dark wilderness; till, hitting his head against a low branch, he fell stunned. He lay several minutes unconscious, came to himself deadly cold, and struggled up on to his feet.

'By Jove!' he thought, with a sort of stammer in his brain: 'this is a bad business! I may be out here all night!' For an unimaginative man, it was extraordinary what vivid images he had just then. He saw the face of the Government official who had bought his timber, and the slight grimace with which he had agreed to the price. He saw his butler, after the gong had gone, standing like a stuck pig by the sideboard, waiting for him to come down. What would they do when he didn't come? Would they have the *nous* to imagine that he might have lost his way in the coverts, and take lanterns and search for him? Far more likely they would think he had walked over to "Greenlands" or "Berrymoor," and stayed there to dinner. And, suddenly, he saw himself slowly freezing out here, in the snowy night, among this cursed timber. With a vigorous shake, he butted again into the darkness among the tree trunks. He was angry now—with himself, with the night, with the trees; so angry that he actually let out with his fist at a trunk against which he had stumbled, and scored his knuckles. It was humiliating; and Sir Arthur Hirries was not accustomed

to humiliation. In anybody else's wood—yes; but to be lost like this in one's own coverts! Well, if he had to walk all night, he would get out! And he plunged on doggedly in the darkness.

He was fighting with his timber now, as if the thing were alive and each tree an enemy. In the interminable stumbling exertion of that groping progress his angry mood gave place to half-comatose philosophy. Trees! His great-great-grandfather had planted them! His own was the fifth man's life, but the trees were almost as young as ever; they made nothing of a man's life! He sniggered: And a man made nothing of theirs! Did they know they were going to be cut down? All the better if they did, and were sweating in their shoes. He pinched himself—his thoughts were becoming so queer! He remembered that once, when his liver was out of order, trees had seemed to him like solid, tall diseases—bulbous, scarred, cavernous, witch-armed, fungoid emanations of the earth. Well, so they were! And he was among them, on a snowy pitch-black night, engaged in this death-struggle! The occurrence of the word death in his thoughts brought him up all standing. Why couldn't he concentrate his mind on getting out; why was he mooning about the life and nature of trees instead of trying to remember the conformation of his coverts, so as to re-kindle

in himself some sense of general direction? He struck a number of matches, to get a sight of his watch again. Great heaven! He had been walking nearly two hours since he last looked at it; and in what direction? They said a man in a fog went round and round because of some kink in his brain! He began now to feel the trees, searching for a hollow trunk. A hollow would be some protection from the cold—his first conscious confession of exhaustion. He was not in training, and he was sixty-five. The thought: 'I can't keep this up much longer,' caused a second explosion of sullen anger. Damnation! Here he was—for all he could tell—standing where he had sat perhaps a dozen times on his spread shooting stick; watching sunlight on bare twigs, or the nose of his spaniel twitching beside him, listening to the tap of the beaters' sticks, and the shrill, drawn-out: "Marrk! Cock over!" Would they let the dogs out, to pick up his tracks? No! ten to one they would assume he was staying the night at the Summertons, or at Lady Mary's, as he had done before now, after dining there. And suddenly his strained heart leaped. He had struck a ride again! His mind slipped back into place like an elastic let-go, relaxed, quivering gratefully. He had only to follow this ride, and somewhere, somehow, he would come out. And be hanged if he would let

them know what a fool he had made of himself! Right or left—which way? He turned so that the flying snow came on his back, hurrying forward between the denser darkness on either hand, where the timber stood in walls, moving his arms across and across his body, as if dragging a concertina to full stretch, to make sure that he was keeping in the path. He went what seemed an interminable way like this, till he was brought up all standing by trees, and could find no outlet, no continuation. Turning in his tracks, with the snow in his face now, he retraced his steps till once more he was brought-up short by trees. He stood panting. It was ghastly—ghastly! And in a panic he dived this way and that to find the bend, the turning, the way on. The sleet stung his eyes, the wind fleered and whistled, the boughs sloughed and moaned. He struck matches, trying to shade them with his cold, wet hands, but one by one they went out, and still he found no turning. The ride must have a blind alley at either end, the turning be down the side somewhere! Hope revived in him. Never say die! He began a second retracing of his steps, feeling the trunks along one side, to find a gap. His breath came with difficulty. What would old Brodley say if he could see him, soaked, sweating, frozen, tired to death, stumbling along in the darkness among

this cursed timber—old Brodley who had told him his heart was in poor case! . . . A gap? Ah! No trunks—a ride at last! He turned, felt a sharp pain in his knee and pitched forward. He could not rise—the knee dislocated six years ago was out again. Sir Arthur Hirries clenched his teeth. Nothing more could happen to him! But after a minute—blank and bitter—he began to crawl along the new ride. Oddly he felt less discouraged and alarmed on hands and knee—for he could use but one. It was a relief to have his eyes fixed on the ground, not peering at the tree trunks; or perhaps there was less strain for the moment on his heart. He crawled, stopping every minute or so, to renew his strength. He crawled mechanically, waiting for his heart, his knee, his lungs to stop him. The earth was snowed over, and he could feel its cold wetness as he scraped along. Good tracks to follow, if anybody struck them! But in this dark forest——! In one of his halts, drying his hands as best he could, he struck a match, and sheltering it desperately, fumbled out his watch. Past ten o'clock! He wound the watch, and put it back against his heart. If only he could wind his heart! And squatting there he counted his matches—four! 'Well,' he thought grimly, 'I won't light them to show me my blasted trees. I've got a cigar left; I'll keep them for that.' And

he crawled on again. He must keep going while he could!

He crawled till his heart and lungs and knee struck work; and, leaning his back against a tree, sat huddled together, so exhausted that he felt nothing save a sort of bitter heartache. He even dropped asleep, waking with a shudder, dragged from a dream armchair at the Club into this cold, wet darkness and the blizzard moaning in the trees. He tried to crawl again, but could not, and for some minutes stayed motionless, hugging his body with his arms. 'Well,' he thought vaguely, 'I *have* done it!' His mind was in such lethargy that he could not even pity himself. His matches: Could he make a fire? But he was no woodsman, and, though he groped around, could find no fuel that was not soaking wet. He scraped a hole and with what papers he had in his pockets tried to kindle the wet wood. No good! He had only two matches left now, and he remembered his cigar. He took it out, bit the end off, and began with infinite precautions to prepare for lighting it. The first burned, and the cigar drew. He had one match left, in case he dozed and let the thing go out. Looking up through the blackness he could see a star. He fixed his eyes on it, and leaning against the trunk, drew the smoke down into his lungs. With his arms crossed tightly on his breast

he smoked very slowly. When it was finished—what? Cold, and the wind in the trees until the morning! Half way through the cigar, he dozed off, slept a long time, and woke up so cold that he could barely summon vitality enough to strike his last match. By some miracle it burned, and he got his cigar to draw again. This time he smoked it nearly to its end, without mentality, almost without feeling, except the physical sense of bitter cold. Once with a sudden clearing of the brain, he thought faintly: 'Thank God, I sold the—trees, and they'll all come down!' The thought drifted away in frozen incoherence, drifted out like his cigar smoke into the sleet; and with a faint grin on his lips he dozed off again. . . .

An under-keeper found him at ten o'clock next morning, blue from cold, under a tall elm tree, within a mile of his bed, one leg stretched out, the other hunched up toward his chest, with its foot dug into the undergrowth for warmth, his head huddled into the collar of his coat, his arms crossed on his breast. They said he must have been dead at least five hours. Along one side snow had drifted against him; but the trunk had saved his back and other side. Above him, the spindly top boughs of that tall tree were covered with green-gold clusters of tiny crinkled elm flowers, against a deep blue sky—gay as a song of perfect

praise. The wind had dropped, and after the cold of the night the birds were singing their clearest in the sunshine.

They did not cut down the elm tree under which they found his body, with the rest of the sold timber, but put a little iron fence round it, and a little tablet on its trunk.

1920.

XXXIII

A HEDONIST

UPERT K. VANESS remains freshly in my mind because he was so fine and large, and because he summed up in his person and behaviour a philosophy which, budding before the war, hibernated during that distressing epoch, and is now again in bloom.

He was a New Yorker addicted to Italy. One often puzzled over the composition of his blood. From his appearance it was rich; and his name fortified the conclusion. What the K. stood for, however, I never learned; the three possibilities were equally intriguing. Had he a strain of Highlander with Kenneth or Keith; a drop of German or Scandinavian with Kurt or Knut; a blend of Syrian or Armenian with Khalil or Kassim? The blue in his fine eyes seemed to preclude the last, but there was an encouraging curve in his nostrils, and a raven gleam in his auburn hair, which by the way was beginning to grizzle and recede when I knew him. The flesh of his face, too, had sometimes a tired and pouchy appearance, and

his tall body looked a trifle rebellious within his extremely well-cut clothes—but, after all, he was fifty-five. You felt that Vaness was a philosopher, yet he never bored you with his views, and was content to let you grasp his moving principle gradually, through watching what he ate, drank, smoked, wore, and how he encircled himself with the beautiful things and people of this life. One presumed him rich, for one was never conscious of money in his presence. Life moved round him with a certain noiseless ease or stood still at a perfect temperature, like the air in a conservatory round a choice blossom which a draught might shrivel.

This image of a flower in relation to Rupert K. Vaness pleases me, because of that little incident in Magnolia Garden, near Charleston, South Carolina.

Vaness was the sort of man of whom one could never say with safety whether he was revolving round a beautiful young woman or whether the beautiful young woman was revolving round him. His looks, his wealth, his taste, his reputation, invested him with a certain sun-like quality; but his age, the recession of his locks, and the advancement of his waist were beginning to dim his lustre; so that whether he was moth or candle was becoming a moot point. It was moot to me,

watching him and Miss Sabine Monroy at Charleston throughout the month of March. The casual observer would have said that she was "playing him up" as a young poet of my acquaintance puts it; but I was not casual. For me Vaness had the attraction of a theorem, and I was looking rather deeply into him and Miss Monroy. That girl had charm. She came, I think, from Baltimore, with a strain in her, they said, of old Southern Creole blood. Tall and what is known as willowy, with dark chestnut hair, very broad dark eyebrows, very soft quick eyes, and a pretty mouth—when she did not accentuate it with lip-salve—she had more sheer quiet vitality than any girl I ever saw. It was delightful to watch her dance, ride, play tennis. She laughed with her eyes; she talked with a savouring vivacity. She never seemed tired or bored. She was —in one hackneyed word—"attractive." And Vaness, the connoisseur, was quite obviously attracted. Of men who professionally admire beauty one can never tell offhand whether they definitely design to add a pretty woman to their collection, or whether their dalliance is just matter of habit. But he stood and sat about her, he drove and rode, listened to music, and played cards with her; he did all but dance with her, and even at times trembled on the brink of that. And

his eyes—those fine lustrous eyes of his—followed her about.

How she had remained unmarried to the age of twenty-six was a mystery, till one reflected that with her power of enjoying life she could not yet have had the time. Her perfect physique was at full stretch for eighteen hours out of the twenty-four each day. Her sleep must have been like that of a baby. One figured her sinking into dreamless rest the moment her head touched pillow, and never stirring till she sprang up into her bath.

As I say, for me, Vaness, or rather his philosophy, *erat demonstrandum*. I was philosophically in some distress just then. The microbe of fatalism, already present in the brains of artists before the War, had been considerably enlarged by that depressing occurrence. Could a civilisation basing itself on the production of material advantages, do anything but ensure the desire for more and more material advantages? Could it promote progress even of a material character except in countries whose resources were still much in excess of their population? The war had seemed to me to show that mankind was too combative an animal ever to recognise that the good of all was the good of one. The coarse-fibred, pugnacious, and self-seeking would, I had become sure, always carry too many guns for the refined and

kindly. In short, there was not enough altruism to go round—not half, not a hundredth part enough. The simple heroism of mankind, disclosed or rather accentuated by the war, seemed to afford no hope—it was so exploitable by the rhinoceri and tigers of high life. The march of science appeared on the whole to be carrying us backward. I deeply suspected that there had been ages when the populations of this earth, though less numerous and comfortable, had been proportionately more healthy than they were at present. As for religion, I had never had the least faith in Providence rewarding the pitiable by giving them a future life of bliss; the theory seemed to me illogical, for even more pitiable in this life appeared to me the thick-skinned and successful, and these, as we know, in the saying about the camel and the needle's eye, our religion consigns wholesale to hell. Success, power, wealth—those aims of profiteers and premiers, pedagogues and Pandemoniacs, of all, in fact, who could not see God in a dewdrop, hear Him in distant goat-bells, and scent Him in a pepper tree—had always appeared to me akin to dry rot. And yet every day one saw more distinctly that they were the pea in the thimble-rig of life, the hub of a universe which, to the approbation of the majority they represented, they were fast making uninhabita-

ble. It did not even seem of any use to help one's neighbours; all efforts at relief just gilded the pill and encouraged our stubbornly contentious leaders to plunge us all into fresh miseries. So I was searching right and left for something to believe in, willing to accept even Rupert K. Vaness and his basking philosophy. But could a man bask his life right out? Could just looking at fine pictures, tasting rare fruits and wines, the mere listening to good music, the scent of azaleas and the best tobacco, above all the society of pretty women, keep salt in my bread, an ideal in my brain? Could they? That's what I wanted to know.

Everyone who goes to Charleston in the Spring, soon or late, visits Magnolia Garden. A painter of flowers and trees, myself, I specialise in gardens, and freely assert that none in the world is so beautiful as this. Even before the magnolias come out, it consigns the Boboli at Florence, the Cinnamon Gardens of Colombo, Concepcion at Malaga, Versailles, Hampton Court, the Generaliffe at Granada, and La Mortola to the category of "also ran." Nothing so free, gracious, so lovely and wistful, nothing so richly coloured, yet so ghostlike, exists, planted by the sons of men. It is a kind of Paradise which has wandered down, a miraculously enchanted wilderness. Brilliant with azaleas, or magnolia-pale, it centres round

a pool of water, overhung by tall trunks festooned with the grey Florida moss. Beyond anything I have ever seen, it is other-worldly. And I went there day after day, drawn as one is drawn in youth by visions of the Ionian Sea, of the East, or the Pacific Isles. I used to sit paralysed by the absurdity of putting brush to canvas, in front of that dream-pool. I wanted to paint of it a picture like that of the fountain, by Helleu, which hangs in the Luxembourg. But I knew I never should.

I was sitting there one sunny afternoon with my back to a clump of azaleas, watching an old coloured gardener—so old that he had started life as an "owned" negro, they said, and certainly still retained the familiar suavity of the old-time darkie—I was watching him prune the shrubs when I heard the voice of Rupert K. Vaness say, quite close: "There's nothing for me but beauty, Miss Monroy."

The two were evidently just behind my azalea clump, perhaps four yards away, yet as invisible as if in China.

"Beauty is a wide, wide word. Define it, Mr. Vaness."

"An ounce of fact is worth a ton of theory—it stands before me."

"Come now, that's just a get-out. Is beauty of the flesh or of the spirit?"

"What is the spirit, as you call it? I'm a Pagan."

"Oh! so am I. But the Greeks were Pagans."

"Well, spirit is only the refined side of sensual appreciations."

"I wonder!"

"I have spent my life in finding that out."

"Then, the feeling this garden rouses in me is purely sensuous?"

"Of course. If you were standing there blind and deaf, without the powers of scent and touch, where would your feeling be?"

"You are very discouraging, Mr. Vaness."

"No, Madam—I face facts. When I was a youngster I had plenty of fluffy aspiration towards I didn't know what—I even used to write poetry."

"Oh! Mr. Vaness, was it good?"

"It was not. I very soon learned that a genuine sensation was worth all the uplift in the world."

"What is going to happen when your senses strike work?"

"I shall sit in the sun and fade out."

"I certainly do like your frankness."

"You think me a cynic, of course; I am nothing so futile, Miss Sabine. A cynic is just a posing ass proud of his attitude. I see nothing to be

proud of in my attitude, just as I see nothing to be proud of in the truths of existence."

"Suppose you had been poor?"

"My senses would be lasting better than they are; and when they at last failed, I should die quicker, from want of food and warmth—that's all."

"Have you ever been in love, Mr. Vaness?"

"I am in love now."

"And your love has no element of devotion, no finer side?"

"None. It wants."

"I have never been in love. But, if I were, I think I should want to lose myself, rather than to gain the other."

"Would you? Sabine, *I am in love with you.*"

"Oh! Shall we walk on?"

I heard their footsteps, and was alone again, with the old gardener lopping at his shrubs.

But what a perfect declaration of hedonism; how simple and how solid was this Vaness theory of existence! Almost Assyrian—worthy of Louis Quinze!

And just then the old negro came up.

"It's pleasant settin'," he said in his polite and hoarse half whisper; "dar ain't no flies yet."

"It's perfect, Richard. This is the most beautiful spot in the world."

"Sure," he answered, softly drawling. "In de

war time de Yanks nearly burn d'house heah. Sherman's Yanks. Sure dey did; po'ful angry wi' ole Massa dey was, 'cos he hid up d' silver plate afore he went away. My ole father was de factotalum den. De Yanks took'm, Suh; dey took'm; and de Major he tell my fader to show'm whar de plate was. My ole fader he look at 'm an' say: 'Wot yuh take me foh? Yuh take me for a sneakin' nigger? No, Suh, yuh kin do wot yuh like wid dis chile, he ain't goin' to act no Judas. No, Suh!' And de Yankee Major he put'm up against dat tall live oak dar, an' he say: 'Yu darn ungrateful nigger. I'se come all dis way to set yuh free. Now, whar's dat silver plate, or I shoot yuh up, sure!' 'No, Suh,' says my fader, 'shoot away. I'se never goin' t' tell.' So dey begin to shoot, and shot all roun'm to skeer'm up. I was a lil' boy den, an' I see my ole fader wid my own eyes, Suh, standin' thar's bold's Peter. No, Suh, dey didn't never got no word from him; he loved de folk heah; sure he did."

The old man smiled; and in that beatific smile I saw not only his perennial pleasure in the well-known story, but the fact that he too would have stood there with the bullets raining round him, sooner than betray the folk he loved.

"Fine story, Richard. But—very silly obstinate old man, your father, wasn't he?"

He looked at me with a sort of startled anger, which slowly broadened into a grin; then broke into soft hoarse laughter.

"Oh! yes, Suh, sure! Berry silly obstinacious ole man. Yes, Suh, indeed!" And he went off cackling to himself.

He had only just gone when I heard footsteps again behind my azalea clump, and Miss Monroy's voice:

"Your philosophy is that of faun and nymph. But can you play the part?"

"Only let me try." Those words had such a fevered ring, that in imagination I could see Vaness all flushed, his fine eyes shining, his well-kept hands trembling, his lips a little protruded.

There came a laugh, high, gay, sweet.

"Very well, then; catch me!" I heard a swish of skirt against the shrubs, the sound of flight; an astonished gasp from Vaness, and the heavy thud thud of his feet, following on the path through the azalea maze. I hoped fervently that they would not suddenly come running past and see me sitting there. My straining ears caught another laugh far off, a panting sound, a muttered oath, a far-away Cooee! And then, staggering, winded, pale with heat and with vexation, Vaness appeared, caught sight of me, and stood a moment —baff! Sweat was running down his face, his

hand was clutching at his side, his stomach heaved—a hunter beaten and undignified. He muttered, turned abruptly on his heel, and left me staring at where his fastidious dandyism and all that it stood for had so abruptly come undone.

I know not how he and Miss Monroy got home to Charleston; not in the same car, I guess. As for me, I travelled deep in thought, conscious of having witnessed something rather tragic, not looking forward to my next encounter with Vaness.

He was not at dinner, but the girl was there; radiant as ever; and though I was glad she had not been caught, I was almost angry at the signal triumph of her youth. She wore a black dress with a red flower in her hair, and another at her breast, and had never looked so vital and so pretty. Instead of dallying with my cigar beside cool waters in the lounge of the hotel, I strolled out afterwards on the Battery and sat down beside the statue of a tutelary personage. A lovely evening: from some tree or shrub close by emerged an adorable faint fragrance, and in the white electric light the acacia foliage was patterned out against a thrilling blue sky. If there were no fireflies abroad, there should have been. A night for hedonists indeed!

And, suddenly, in fancy, there came before me Vaness's well-dressed person, panting, pale, perplexed; and beside him, by a freak of vision, stood the old darkie's father, bound to the live oak, with the bullets whistling past, and his face transfigured. There they stood alongside—the creed of pleasure, which depended for fulfilment on its waist measurement; and the creed of love devoted unto death!

'Aha!' I thought: 'which of the two laughs *last?*'

And just then I saw Vaness himself beneath a lamp; cigar in mouth, and cape flung back so that its silk lining shone. Pale and heavy, in the cruel white light, his face had a bitter look. And I was sorry—very sorry, at that moment, for Rupert K. Vaness.

1920.

XXXIV

THE MAN WHO KEPT HIS FORM

IN these days every landmark is like Alice's flamingo-croquet-mallet—when you refer to it, the creature curls up into an interrogation mark and looks into your face; and every cornerstone resembles her hedgehog-croquet-ball, which, just before you can use it, gets up and walks away. The old flavours of life are out of fashion, the old scents considered stale; "gentleman" is a word to sneer at, and "form" a sign of idiocy.

And yet there are families in the British Isles in which gentility has persisted for hundreds of years, and though you may think me old-fashioned and romantic, I am convinced that such gentlefolk often have a certain quality, a kind of inner pluck bred into them, which is not to be despised at all.

This is why I tell you my recollections of Miles Ruding.

My first sight of him—if a new boy may look

at a monitor—was on my rather wretched second day at a Public School. The three other pups who occupied an attic with me, had gone out, and I was ruefully considering whether I had a right to any wall-space on which to hang two small oleographs depicting very scarlet horsemen on very bay horses, jumping very brown hedges, which my mother had bought me, thinking they might be suitable to the manly taste for which Public Schools are celebrated. I had taken them out of my playbox, together with the photographs of my parents and eldest sister, and spread them all on the window-seat. I was gazing at the little show lugubriously when the door was opened by a boy in "tails."

"Hallo!" he said. "You new?"

"Yes," I answered in a mouselike voice.

"I'm Ruding. Head of the House. You get an allowance of two bob weekly when it's not stopped. You'll see the fagging lists on the board. You don't get any fagging the first fortnight. What's your name?"

"Bartlet."

"Oh! Ah!" he examined a piece of paper in his hand. "You're one of mine. How are you getting on?"

"Pretty well."

"That's all right." He seemed about to with-

draw, so I asked him hastily: "Please, am I allowed to hang these pictures?"

"Rather—any pictures you like. Let's look at them!" He came forward. When his eyes fell on the array, he said abruptly: "Oh! Sorry!" and, taking up the oleos, he turned his back on the photographs. A new boy is something of a psychologist out of sheer fright, and when he said "Sorry!" because his eyes had fallen on the effigies of my people, I felt somehow that he couldn't be a beast. "You got these at Tompkins'," he said. "I had the same my first term. Not bad. I should put 'em up here."

While he was holding them to the wall I took a "squint" at him. He seemed to me of a fabulous height—about five feet ten, I suppose; thin, and bolt upright. He had a stick-up collar—"barmaids" had not yet come in—but not a very high one, and his neck was rather long. His hair was peculiar, dark and crisp, with a reddish tinge; and his dark-grey eyes were small and deep in, his cheekbones rather high, his cheeks thin and touched with freckles. His nose, chin, and cheekbones all seemed a little large for his face as yet. If I may put it so, there was a sort of unfinished finish about him. But he looked straight, and had a nice smile.

"Well, young Bartlet," he said, handing me

back the pictures, "buck up, and you'll be all right."

I put away my photographs, and hung the oleos. Ruding! The name was familiar. Among the marriages in my family pedigree, such as "—daughter of Fitzherbert," "daughter of Tastborough," occurred the entry: "daughter of Ruding"—some time before the Civil War. Daughter of Ruding! This demigod might be a far-off kinsman. But I felt I should never dare to tell him of the coincidence.

Miles Ruding was not brilliant, but pretty good at everything. He was not well dressed—you did not think of dress in connection with him either one way or the other. He was not exactly popular—being reserved, far from showy, and not rich—but he had no "side," and never either patronised or abused his juniors. He was not indulgent to himself or others, but he was very just; and, unlike many monitors, seemed to take no pleasure in "whopping." He never fell off in "trials" at the end of a term, and was always playing as hard at the finish of a match as at the start. One would have said he had an exacting conscience, but he was certainly the last person to mention such a thing. He never showed his feelings, yet he never seemed trying to hide them, as I used always to be. He was greatly respected

without seeming to care; an independent, self-dependent bird, who would have cut a greater dash if he hadn't been so, as it were, uncreative. In all those two years I only had one at all intimate talk with him, which after all was perhaps above the average number, considering the difference in our ages. In my fifth term and Ruding's last but one, there had been some disciplinary rumpus in the house, which had hurt the dignity of the captain of the football "torpid" eleven—a big Irish boy who played back and was the mainstay of the side. It happened on the eve of our first house match and the sensation may be imagined when this important person refused to play; physically and spiritually sore, he declared for the part of Achilles and withdrew to his tent. The house rocked with pro and con. My sympathies, in common with nearly all below the second fifth, lay with Donelly against the sixth form. His defection had left me captain of the side, so that the question whether we could play at all depended on me. If I declared a sympathetic strike, the rest would follow. That evening, after long hours of "*fronde*" with other rebellious spirits, I was alone and still in two minds, when Ruding came into my room. He leaned against the door, and said: "Well, Bartlet, *you're* not going to rat?"

"I—I don't think Donelly ought to have been —been whopped," I stammered.

"That's as may be," he said, "but the house comes first. You know that."

Torn between the loyalties, I was silent.

"Look here, young Bartlet," he said suddenly, "it'll be a disgrace to us all, and it hangs on you."

"All right," I said sulkily, "I'll play."

"Good chap!"

"But I don't think Donelly ought to have been whopped," I repeated inanely; "he's—he's too big."

Ruding approached till he looked right down on me in my old "froust," as we called arm-chairs. "One of these days," he said slowly, "you'll be head of the house yourself. You'll have to keep up the prestige of the sixth form. If you let great louts like Donelly cheek little weak six-formers with impunity" (I remember how impressed I was by the word), "you'll let the whole show down. My old governor runs a district in Bengal, about as big as Wales, entirely on prestige. He's often talked to me about it. I hate whopping anybody, but I'd much rather whop a lout like Donelly than I would a little new chap. He's a swine anyway for turning the house down because his back is sore."

"It isn't that," I said, "it—it wasn't just."

"If it was unjust," said Ruding, with what seems to me now extraordinary patience, "then the whole system's wrong, and that's a pretty big question, young Bartlet. Anyway, it's not for me to decide. I've got to administer what is. Shake hands, and do your damnedest to-morrow, won't you?"

I put out my hand with a show of reluctance, though secretly won over.

We got an awful hiding, but I can still hear Ruding's voice yelling: "Well played, Bartlet! Well pla-a-ayed!"

I have only one other school recollection of Miles Ruding which lets any real light in on him. On the day he left for good I happened to travel up to Town in the same carriage. He sat looking through the window back at the old Hill, and I distinctly saw a tear run down his cheek. He must have been conscious that I had remarked the phenomenon, for he said suddenly:

"Damn! I've got a grit in my eye," and began to pull the eyelid down in a manner which did not deceive me in the least.

I then lost sight of him completely for several years. His people were not well off, and he did not go up to the 'Varsity. He once said to me: "My family's beastly old, and beastly poor."

It was during one of my Odysseys in connec-

tion with sport that I saw him again. He was growing fruit on a ranch in Vancouver Island. Nothing used to strike a young Englishman travelling in the Colonies more than the difference between what he saw and what all printed matter led him to expect. When I ran across Ruding in the Club at Victoria and he invited me to stay with him, I expected rows of fine trees with large pears and apples hanging on them, a Colonial house with a broad verandah, and Ruding in ducks, among rifles and fishing rods, and spirited horses. What I found was a bare new wooden house, not yet painted, in a clearing of the heavy forest. His fruit trees had only just been planted, and he would be lucky if he got a crop within three years. He wore, not white ducks, but blue jeans, and worked about twelve hours a day, felling timber and clearing fresh ground. He had one horse to ride and drive, and got off for a day's shooting or fishing about once a month. He had three Chinese boys working under him, and lived nearly as sparingly as they. He had been out of England eight years, and this was his second venture—the first in Southern California had failed after three years of drought. He would be all right for water here, he said; which seemed likely enough in a country whose rainfall is superior to that of England.

"How the devil do you stand the loneliness?" I said.

"Oh! one gets used to it. Besides, this isn't lonely—Good Lord, no! You should see some places!"

Living this sort of life, he yet seemed exactly what he used to be—in fact, he had kept his form. He didn't precisely dress for dinner, but he washed. He had English papers sent out to him, and read Victorian poetry, and history natural and unnatural, in the evenings over his pipe. He shaved every day, had his cold tub every morning, and treated his Chinese boys just as he used to treat us new boys at school; so far as I could tell, they seemed to have for him much the feelings we used to have—a respect not amounting to fear, and a liking not quite rising to affection.

"I couldn't live here without a woman," I said one evening.

He sighed. "I don't want to mess myself up with anything short of a wife; and I couldn't ask a girl to marry me till the place is fit for her. This fruit-growing's always a gamble at first."

"You're an idealist," I said.

He seemed to shrink, and it occurred to me suddenly that if there were anything he hated, it would be a generalisation like that. But I was in a teasing mood.

"You're keeping up the prestige of the English gentleman."

His teeth gritted on his pipe-stem. "I'm dashed if I'm keeping up anything except my end; that's quite enough."

"And exactly the same thing," I murmured.

He turned away. I felt he was much annoyed with me for trying to introduce him to self-consciousness. And he was right! It's destructive; and his life held too many destructive elements —silence, solitude, distance from home, and this daily mixing with members of an Eastern race. I used to watch the faces of his Chinese boys—remote as cats, wonderfully carved, and old, and self-sufficient. I appreciate now how much of what was carved and old and self-sufficient Ruding needed in himself to live year in, year out, alone among them, without losing his form. All that week of my visit I looked with diabolical curiosity for some sign of deterioration—of the coarsening, or softening which one felt ought naturally to come of such a life. Honestly, I could not find a trace, save that he wouldn't touch whisky, as if he were afraid of it, and shied away at any mention of women.

"Aren't you ever coming home?" I asked when I was taking leave.

"When I've made good here," he said, "I shall come back and marry."

"And then out again?"

"I expect so. I've got no money, you know."

Four years later I happened to see the following in *The Times:* "Ruding—Fuljambe: At St. Thomas's, Market Harborough, Miles Ruding of Bear Ranch, Vancouver Island, to Blanche, daughter of Charles Fuljambe, J. P. Market Harborough." So it seemed he *had* made good! But I wondered what "daughter of Fuljambe" would make of it out there. Well, I came across Ruding and his wife that very summer at Eastbourne, where they were spending the butt end of their long honeymoon. She was pleasant, pretty, vivacious—too vivacious I felt when I thought of Bear Ranch; and Ruding himself, under the stimulus of his new venture, was as nearly creative as I ever saw him. We dined and bathed, played tennis and went riding on the Downs together. Daughter of Fuljambe was quite "a sport"—though, indeed, in 1899 that word had hardly come into use. I confess to wondering why, exactly, she had married my friend, till she gave me the history of it one evening. It seems their families were old neighbours, and when Ruding came back after having been away in the New World for twelve years, he was something

of a curiosity, if not of a hero. He had been used to take her out hunting when she was a small child, so that she had an old-time reverence for him. He seemed, in his absence of small-talk and "side," superior to the rattle-pated young men about her—here daughter of Fuljambe gave me a sidelong glance—and one day he had done a thing which toppled her into his arms. She was to go to a fancy dress ball one evening as a Chinese lady. But in the morning a cat upset a bottle of ink over her dress and reduced it to ruin. What was to be done? All the elaborate mask of make-up and head-dressing, which she had rehearsed to such perfection, sacrificed for want of a dress to wear it with! Ruding left that scene of desolation possessed by his one great creative impulse. It seemed that he had in London a Chinese lady's dress which he had brought home with him from San Francisco. No trains from Market Harborough could possibly get him up to Town and back in time, so he had promptly commandeered the only neighbouring motor car, driven it up at a rate which must have approached forty miles an hour—a really fabulous speed for those days—got the dress, sent daughter of Fuljambe a wire, motored back at the same furious pace, and appeared before her door with the dress at eight forty-five. Daughter of Fuljambe received him in

her dressing-gown, with her hair combed up and her face beautifully painted. Ruding said quietly: "Here you are; it's the genuine thing," and disappeared before she had time to thank him. The dress was superior to the one the cat had spoiled. That night she accepted him. "Miles didn't properly propose to me," she said; "I saw he couldn't bear to, because of what he'd done, so I just had to tell him not to keep his form so awfully. And here we are! He *is* a dear, isn't he?"

In his dealings with her he certainly was, for she was a self-centred little person.

They went off to Vancouver Island in September. The following January I heard that he had joined a Yeomanry contingent and gone out to fight the Boers. He left his wife in England with her people on his way. I met her once or twice before he was invalided home with enteric. She told me that she had opposed his going, till she found out it was making him quite miserable. "And yet, you know," she said, "he's really frightfully devoted."

When he recovered they went back to Vancouver Island, where he found his ranch so let down that he had to begin nearly all over again. I can imagine what he went through with his dainty and exacting helpmate. She came home in

1904 to get over it, and again I met her out hunting.

"Miles is too good for me," she said the second day as we were jogging home; "he's got such fearful pluck. If only he'd kick his conscience out of the window sometimes. Oh! Mr. Bartlet, I don't want to go back there, I really don't; it's simply deadly. But he says if he gives this up he'll be thirty-eight without a thing to show for it, and just have to cadge round for a job, and he won't do that; but I don't believe I can stand it much longer."

I wrote to Ruding. His answer was dry and inexpressive, but I could read between the lines: Heaven forbid that he should drag his wife out to him again, but he would have to stick it there another two years; then, perhaps, he could sell and buy a farm in England. To clear out now would be ruination. He missed his wife awfully, but—one must hoe one's row, and he would rather she stayed with her people than force herself to rough it out there with him.

Then, of course, came that which a man like Ruding, with his loyalty and his sense of form, is the last to imagine possible. Daughter of Fuljambe met a young man in the Buffs or Greens or Blues, and after, I am sure, a struggle—she was not a bad little sort—went off with him. That

happened early in 1906, just as he was beginning to see the end of his struggle with Bear Ranch. I felt very sorry for him, yet inclined to say: "My dear man, where was your imagination; couldn't you see this was bound to happen with 'daughter of Fuljambe' once she got away from you?" And yet, poor devil, what could he have done?

He came home six thousand miles to give her a divorce. A ghoulish curiosity took me into Court. I never had more whole-hearted admiration for Ruding than I had that day, watching him in that pretentiously crooked Court among us tight-lipped, curly-minded lawyers, giving his unemotional evidence. Straight, thin, lined and brown, with grey already in his peculiar-coloured hair, his voice low, his eyes unwavering, in all his lonely figure a sad, quiet protest—it was not I only who was moved by the little speech he made to the Judge: "My Lord, I should like to say that I have no bitter feelings; I think it was my fault for asking a woman to share a rough, lonely life, so far away." It gave me a queer pleasure to see the little bow the Judge made him, as if saying: "Sir, as one gentleman to another." I had meant to get hold of him after the case, but when it came to the point I felt it was the last thing he would want of anyone. He went straight back the six thousand miles and sold his ranch. Cunning-

ham, who used to be in our house, and had a Government post in Esquimault, told me that Ruding made himself quite unpopular over that sale. Some enterprising gentleman, interested in real estate, had reported the discovery of coal seams, which greatly enhanced the value of Bear Ranch and several neighbouring properties. Ruding was offered a big sum. He took it, and had already left the neighbourhood when the report about coal was duly disproved. Ruding at once offered to cancel the price, and take the agricultural value of the property. His offer was naturally accepted, and the disgust of other owners who had sold on the original report may be imagined. More wedded to the rights of property, they upheld the principle "Caveat emptor," and justified themselves by calling Ruding names. With his diminished proceeds he bought another ranch on the mainland.

How he spent the next eight years I only vaguely know. I don't think he came home at all. Cunningham spoke of him as "Still the same steady-going old chap, awfully respected; but no one knows him very well. He looks much as he did, except that he's gone grey."

Then, like a bolt from hell, came the Great War. I can imagine Ruding almost glad. His imagination would not give him the big horror

of the thing; he would see it as the inevitable struggle, the long-expected chance to show what he and his country were made of. And I must confess that on the evidence he seems to have been made of even better stuff than his country. He began by dyeing his hair. By dint of this and by slurring the eight of his age so that it sounded like forty odd, he was accepted, and, owing to his Transvaal experience, given a commission in Kitchener's army. But he did not get out to France till early in 1916. He was considered by his Colonel the best officer in the regiment for training recruits, and his hair, of course, had soon gone grey again. They said he chafed terribly at being kept at home. In the spring of 1916 he was mentioned in despatches, and that summer was badly gassed on the Somme. I went to see him in hospital. He had grown a little grey moustache, but otherwise seemed quite unchanged. I grasped at once that he was one of those whose nerve—no matter what happened to him—would see it through. One had the feeling that this would be so as a matter of course, that he himself had not envisaged any other possibility. He was so completely lost in the winning of the war, that his own sensations seemed to pass him by. He had become as much of a soldier as the best of those professionally unimaginative stoical creatures,

and quite naturally, as if it were in his blood. He dwelt quietly, without visible emotion, in that universal atmosphere of death. All was in the day's work, so long as the country emerged victorious; nor did there seem the least doubt in his mind but that it would so emerge. A part of me went with him all the way, but a part of me stared at him in curiosity, surprise, admiration, and a sort of contempt, as at a creature too single-hearted and uncomplicated. One side of me was bred like him—armorial bearings, daughter of Ruding, and all the rest of it—the other had new blood with all its doubts and ferments.

I saw him several times in that Hospital at Teignmouth, where he recovered slowly.

One day I asked him point blank whether one's nerve was not bound to go in time. He looked a little surprised and said rather coldly: "Not if your heart's in the right place."

That was it to a T. His heart was so deeply rooted in exactly the right place that nothing external could get at it. Whatever downed Ruding would have to blow him up bodily—there was no detaching his heart from the rest of him. And that's what I mean by an inbred quality, the inner pluck that you can bet on. I don't say it's not to be found in private soldiers and "new" people, but not in quite the same—shall we say?

—matter of course way. When those others have it, they're proud of it or conscious of it, or simply primitively virile and thick-skinned; they don't —like such as Ruding—regard not having it as "impossible," a sort of disgrace. If scientists could examine the nerves of men like him, would they discern a faint difference in their colour or texture—the result of generations of nourishment above the average and of a traditional philosophy which for hundreds of years has held fear to be *the* cardinal offence? I wonder.

He went out again in 1917, and was out for the rest of the war. He did nothing very startling or brilliant; but, as at school, he was always on the ball, finishing as hard as when he started. At the Armistice he was a Lieutenant-Colonel, and a Major when he was gazetted out, at the age of fifty-three, with the various weaknesses which gas and a prolonged strain leave in a man of that age, but no pensionable disability. He went back to Vancouver. Anyone at all familiar with fruit-growing knows it for a pursuit demanding the most even and constant attention. When Ruding joined up he had perforce left his ranch in the first hands which came along; and at that time, with almost every rancher in like case, those hands were very poor substitutes for the hands of an owner. He went back to a property prac-

tically valueless. He was not in sufficient health to sit down for another long struggle to pull it round, as after the Boer war, so he sold it for a song and came home again, full of confidence that, with his record, he would get a job. He found that his case was that of thousands. They didn't want him back in the Army. They were awfully sorry, but they didn't know what they could do for him. The Governmental education and employment schemes, too, seemed all for younger men. He sat down on the song and the savings from his pay to wait for some ship or other out of his fleet of applications to come home. It did not come; his savings went. How did I know all this? I will tell you.

One night last January I had occasion to take a cab from a restaurant in Soho to my Club in Pall Mall. It was wet, and I got in hastily. I was sitting there comatose from my good dinner when I had a queer feeling that I knew the back of the driver. It had—what shall I call it?—a refined look. The man's hair was grey; and I began trying to recollect the profile I had glimpsed when bolting in. Suddenly with a sort of horror the thought flashed through me: Miles Ruding!

It was!

When I got out and we looked each other in the face, he smiled and my lips quivered. "Old

chap," I said, "draw your cab up on that stand and get in with me."

When we were sitting together in his cab we lighted cigarettes, and didn't speak for quite a minute, till I burst out:

"Look here! What does this mean?"

"Bread and butter."

"Good God! And this is what the Country——"

"Bartlet," he said, through curiously set lips, with a little fixed smile about the corners, "cut out all that about the Country. I prefer this to any more cadging for a job; that's all."

Silent from shame, I broke out at last: "It's the limit! What about the Government schemes?"

"No go! they're all for younger men."

"My dear chap!" was all I could find to say.

"This isn't a bad life in good weather," he went on with that queer smile; "I haven't much of a chest now."

"Do you mean to say you contemplate going on with this?"

"Till something turns up; but I'm no good at asking for things, Bartlet; I simply can't do it."

"What about your people?"

"Dead or broke."

"Come and stay with me till your ship comes home."

He squeezed my arm and shook his head. That's what's so queer about gentility! If only I could have established a blood tie! Ruding would have taken help or support from his kinsfolk—would have inherited without a qualm from a second cousin that he'd never seen; but from the rest of the world it would be charity. Sitting in that cab of his, he told me, without bitterness, the tale which is that of hundreds since the war. Ruding one could not pity to his face, it would have been impossible. And, when he had finished, I could only mutter:

"Well, I think it's damnable, considering what the Country owes you."

He did not answer. You can say what you like about his limitations, but Miles Ruding was bred to keep his form.

I nearly shook his hand off when I left him, and I could see that he disliked that excessive display of feeling. From my Club doorway I looked round. He had resumed his driver's seat, and, through the rain I saw him with the cigarette between his lips, and the lamplight shining on his lean profile. Very still he sat—symbol of that lost cause, gentility.

1920.

XXXV

SANTA LUCIA

RETURNING from the English Church at Monte Carlo towards his hotel, old Trevillian paused at a bend in the road to rest his thin calves. Through a mimosa tree the sea was visible, very blue, and Trevillian's eyes rested on it with the filmy brown stare of old age.

Monte Carlo was changed, but that blue, tideless, impassive sea was the same as on his first visit forty-five years ago, and this was pleasant to one conservative by nature. Since then he had married; made money, and inherited more; "raised," as Americans called it, a family—all, except his daughter Agatha, out in the world; had been widowed, and developed old man's cough. He and Agatha now left The Cedars, their country house in Hertfordshire, for the Riviera with the annual regularity of swallows. Usually they stayed at Nice or Cannes; but this year, because a friend of Agatha's was the wife of

the English Chaplain, they had chosen Monte Carlo.

It was near the end of their stay, and the April sun hot.

Trevillian passed a thin hand down his thin brown hairy face, where bushy eyebrows were still dark, but the pointed beard white; and the effect, under a rather wide-brimmed brown hat, almost too Spanish for an English Bank Director. He was fond of saying that some of the best Cornish families had Spanish blood in their veins, whether Iberian or Armadesque he did not specify. The theory in any case went well with his formalism, growing more formal every year.

Agatha having stayed in with a cold, he had been to Service by himself. A poor gathering! The English out here were a racketty lot! Among the congregation to whom he had that morning read the Lessons he had noted, for instance, that old blackguard Telford, who had run off with two men's wives in his time, and was now living with a French woman, they said. What on earth was *he* doing in Church? And that ostracised couple, the Gaddenhams, who had the villa near Roquebrune? She used his name, but they had never been married—for Gaddenham's wife was still alive. And, more seriously, had he observed

Mrs. Rolfe, who before the war used to come with her husband—now in India—to The Cedars, to shoot the coverts in November. Young Lord Chesherford was hanging about her, they said. That would end in scandal to a certainty! Never without uneasiness did he see that woman, with whom his daughter was on terms of some intimacy. Grass widows were dangerous, especially in a place like this. He must give Agatha a hint. Such doubtful people, he felt, had no business to attend divine service; yet it was difficult to disapprove of people coming to church, and after all—most of them did not! A man of the world, however strong a Churchman, could, of course, rub shoulders with anyone; but it was different when they came near one's womenfolk, or into the halls of one's formal beliefs. To encroach like that showed no sense of the fitness of things. He must certainly speak to Agatha!

The road had lain uphill, and he took breaths of the mimosa-scented air, carefully regulating them so as not to provoke his cough. He was about to proceed on his way when a piano organ across the road burst into tune. The man who turned the handle was the usual moustachioed Italian, with restive eyes and a game leg; the animal who drew it the customary little grey donkey; the singer, the proverbial dark girl with

an orange head-kerchief; the song she sang, the immemorial "Santa Lucia." Her brassy voice blared out the full metallic a's which seemed to hit the air, as hammers hit the wires of a Czymbal. Trevillian had some music in his soul; he often started out for the Casino concert, though he generally arrived in the playing-rooms, not indeed to adventure more than a five-franc piece or two, for he disapproved of gambling, but because their motley irregularity titillated his formalism, made him feel like a boy a little out of school. He could distinguish, however, between several tunes, and knew this to be neither "God save the King," "Rule Britannia," "Tipperary," nor "Funiculi-Funicula!" Indeed, it had to him a kind of separate ring, a resonance oddly intimate, as if in some other life it had been the beating—the hammering rhythm of his heart. Queer sensation—quite a queer sensation! And he stood, blinking. Of course, he knew that tune now that he heard the words—Santa Lucia; but in what previous existence had its miauling awakened something deep, hot, almost savage within him, sweet and luring like a strange fruit or the scent of a tropical flower? "San-ta Luci-i-a! San-ta Luci-i-a!" Lost! And yet so close to the fingers of his recollection that they itched! The girl stopped singing and came across to him—a

gaudy baggage, with her orange scarf, her beads, the whites of her eyes, and all those teeth! These Latins, emotional, vibrant, light-hearted and probably light-fingered—an inferior race! He felt in his pocket, produced a franc, and moved on slowly.

But at the next bend in the road he halted again. The girl had recommenced, in gratitude for his franc,—"Santa Luci-ia!" What was it buried in him, under the fallen leaves of years and years?

The pink clusters of a pepper tree drooped from behind a low garden wall right over him, while he stood there. The air tingled with its faint savorous perfume, true essence of the South. And again that conviction of a previous existence, of something sweet, burning, poignant caught him in the Adam's apple veiled by his beard. Was it something he had dreamed? Was that the matter with him now—while the organ wailed, the girl's song vibrated? Trevillian's stare lighted on the prickly pears and aloes above the low pink wall. The savagery of those plants jerked his mind forward almost to the pitch of —what? A youth passed, smoking a maize-coloured cigarette, leaving a perfume of Latakia, that tobacco of his own youth, when he too smoked cigarettes made of its black, strong fra-

grant threads. He gazed blankly at the half-obliterated name on the dilapidated garden gate, and spelled it aloud: "V lla Be u S te. Villa Beau Site! Beau ——! By God! I've got it!"

At the unbecoming vigour of his ejaculation, a smile of release, wrinkling round his eyes, furrowed his thin brown cheeks. He went up to the gate. What a coincidence! The very——! He stood staring into a tangled garden, through the fog of forty-five years, resting his large prayer-book with its big print, on the top rail of the old green gate; then, looking up and down the road like a boy about to steal cherries, he lifted the latch and passed in.

Nobody lived here now, he should say. The old pink villa, glimpsed some sixty yards away at the end of that little wilderness, was shuttered, and its paint seemed peeling off. Beau Site! That *was* the name! And this the gate he had been wont to use into this lower garden, invisible from the house. And—yes—here was the little fountain, broken and discoloured now, with the same gargoyle face, and water still dripping from its mouth! And here—the old stone seat his cloak had so often covered. Grown over now—all of it; unpruned the lilacs, mimosas, palms making that dry rustling when the breeze crept into them. He opened his prayer-book, laid it on the

seat, and carefully sat down—he never sat on unprotected stone. He had passed into another world, screened from any eye by the overgrown shrubs and tangled foliage. And, slowly, while he sat there the frost of nearly half a century thawed.

Yes! Little by little, avidly, yet as it were unwillingly, he remembered—sitting on his prayer-book, out of the sun, under the flowering tangled trees.

He had been twenty-six, just after he went into the family bank—he recollected—such a very sucking partner. A neglected cold had given him the first of those bronchial attacks of which he was now reaping the aftermath. Those were the days when, in the chill of a London winter he would—dandy-like—wear thin underclothes and no overcoat. Still coughing at Easter, he had taken three weeks off and a ticket to Mentone. A cousin of his was engaged to a Russian girl whose family had a villa there, and he had pitched his tent in a little hotel almost next door. The Russians of *that* day were the Russians of the Turgenev novels, which Agatha had made him read. A simple, tri-lingual family of gentlefolk, the Rostakovs, father, mother, and two daughters—what was it they had called *him*—Philip Philipovitch? Monsieur Rostakov, with

his beard, his witty French stories, imperfectly understood by young Trevillian, his zest for food and drink, his thick lips, and, as they said, his easy morals—quite a dog in his way! And Madame, nee Princesse Nogárin (a Tartar strain in her, his cousin said); "spirituelle," somewhat worn out by Monsieur Rostakov and her belief in the transmigration of souls. And Varvara, the eldest daughter—the one engaged; only seventeen, with deep-grey, truthful eyes, a broad grave face, dark hair, and a candour—by George!—which had almost frightened him. And the little one Katrina, blue-eyed, snub-nosed, fair-haired, with laughing lips, yet very serious too—charming little creature, whose death from typhoid three years later had given him quite a shock! Delightful family, seen through the mists of time. And now, in all the world you couldn't find a Russian family like that—gone, vanished from the face of the earth! Their estates had been—Ah!—somewhere in South Russia, and a house near Yalta. Cosmopolitan, yet very Russian, with their samovar, and their "Zakouskas"—a word he had never learned to spell—and Rostakov's little glasses of white vodka, and those caviare sandwiches that the girls and he used to take on their picnics to Gorbio, and Castellar, and Belle Enda, riding donkeys, and chaperoned

by that amiable young German lady, their governess . . . Germans, in those days—how different they were! How different the whole of life! The girls riding in their wide skirts, under parasols, the air unspoiled by the fumes of petrol, the carriages with their jangling-belled little horses and bright harness; priests in black, soldiers in bright trousers and yellow shakoes; and beggars—plenty. The girls would gather wild flowers, and press them afterwards; and in the evening Varvara would look at him with her grave eyes and ask him whether he believed in a future life. He had no beliefs to speak of, then, if he remembered rightly; they had come with increasing income, family, and business responsibilities. It had always seemed to hurt her that he thought of sport and dress, and not of his soul. The Russians, in those days, seemed so tremendously concerned about the soul—an excellent thing, of course, but not what one talked of. Still, that first fortnight had been quite idyllic. He remembered one Sunday afternoon—queer how such a little thing could stay in the mind—on the beach near Cap Martin, flicking sand off his boots with his handkerchief, and Varvara saying: "And then to your face again, Philip Philipovitch?" She was always saying things which made him feel uncomfortable. And

in the little letter which Katrina wrote him a year later, with blue forget-me-nots all about the paper, she had reminded him of how he had blushed! Charming young girls—simple—no such, nowadays! The dew was off. They had thought Monte Carlo a vulgar place—what would they think of it now, by Jove! Even Rostakov only went there on the quiet—a *viveur*, that fellow, who would always be living a double life. Trevillian recollected how, under the spell of that idyllic atmosphere, and afraid of Varvara's eyes, he himself had put off from day to day his visit to the celebrated haunt, until one evening when Madame Rostakov had *migraine* and the girls were at a party, he had sauntered to the station and embarked on a Monte Carlo train. How clearly it came back to him—the winding path up through the Gardens, a beautiful still evening, scented and warm, the Casino orchestra playing the Love music from "Faust"—the one opera that he knew well. The darkness, strange with exotic foliage, glimmering with golden lamps —none of this glaring white electric light—had deeply impressed him, who, for all his youthful dandyism, had Puritanism in his blood and training. It was like going up to—well, not precisely heaven! And in his white beard old Trevillian uttered a slight cackle. Anyway, he had

entered "the rooms" with a beating heart. He had no money to throw away in those days; by Jove! no! His father had kept him strictly to an allowance of four hundred a year, and his partnership was still in the apprentice stage. He had only some ten or twenty pounds to spare. But to go back to England and have his fellows say: "What? Monte Carlo, and never played?" was not to be thought of.

His first sensation in the "rooms" was disappointing. The decorations were florid, the people foreign, queer, ugly! For some time he stood still listening to the chink of rake against coin, and the nasal twang of the croupiers' voices. Then he had gone up to a table to watch the game, which he had never played. That, at all events, was the same as now; that, and the expression on the gamblers' faces—the sharp, blind, crab-like absorption like no other human expression. And what a lot of old women! A nervous excitement had crept into his brain while he stood there, an itch into his fingers. But he was shy. All these people played with such deadly calm, seemed so utterly familiar with it all. At last he had reached over the shoulder of a dark-haired woman sitting in front of him, put down a five-franc piece and called out the word: "*Vingt.*" A rake shovelled it forward

on to the number with an indifferent click. The ball rolled: "*Quatorze, Rouge pair et manque.*" His five-franc piece was raked away; but he—Philip Trevillian—had gambled at Monte Carlo, and at once he had seemed to see Varvara's eyes with something of amusement in their candour, and to hear her voice: 'But to gamble! How silly, Philip Philipovitch!' Then the man sitting to his left got up, and he had slipped down into the empty chair. Once seated he knew that he must play. So he pushed another five-franc piece on to black, and received its counterpart. Now he was quits; and continuing that simple stake with varying success he began taking in the faces of his neighbours. On his left he had an old Englishman in evening dress, ruddy, with chubby lips, who played in gold pieces and seemed winning rather heavily; opposite, in a fabulous shawl, a bird-like old woman, with a hook nose, and a man who looked like a Greek bandit in a frock coat. To his right was the dark-haired woman over whose shoulder he had leaned. An agreeable perfume, as of jasmine blossoms, floated from her. She had some tablets, and six or seven gold pieces before her, but seemed to have stopped playing. Out of the tail of his eye Trevillian scrutinised her profile. She was by far the most attractive woman he had seen in here. And he

felt, suddenly, uninterested in the fate of his five-franc pieces. Under the thin dark brows a little drawn down, he could see that her eyes were dark and velvety. Her face was rather pointed, delicate, faintly powdered in the foreign fashion. She wore a low dress, but with a black lace scarf thrown over her gleaming shoulders, and something that glimmered in her dark hair. She was not English; but what he could not tell. He won twice running on black, left his stake untouched, and was conscious that she pushed one of her own gold pieces on to black. Again black won; again he left his stake, and she hers. To be linked with her by that following of his luck, was agreeable to young Trevillian. The devil might care—he would leave his winnings down! Again, and again, till he had won eight times on black, he left his stake, and his neighbour followed suit. A pile of gold was mounting in front of each of them. The eyes of the hawk-like old woman opposite, like those of a crustacean in some book of Natural History, seemed pushed out from her face; a little hard smile on her thin lips seemed saying: "Wait, it will all go back!" The jasmine perfume from his neighbour grew stronger, as though disengaged by increasing emotion; he could see her white neck heave under its black lace. She reached her hand out as though to

gather in her winnings. In bravado Trevillian sat unmoving. Her eyes slid round to his, she withdrew her hand. The little ball rolled. Black! He heard her sigh of relief; she touched his arm. "*Retirez!*" she whispered, "*Retirez,* Monsieur!" and, sweeping in her winnings, she got up. Trevillian hesitated just a moment, then with the thought: 'If I stay, I lose sight of her!' he too reached out, and, gathering in his pile, left the table. Starting with a five-franc piece, in nine successful coups he had won just over a hundred pounds. His neighbour, who had started with a louis, in seven coups—he calculated rapidly—must have won the same. "*Seize, Rouge pair et manque!*" Just in time! Elated, Trevillian turned away. There was the graceful figure of his dark neighbour, threading the throng; and without deliberate intention, yet longing not to lose sight of her, he followed. A check in her progress brought him so close, however, that he was at infinite pains to seem unconscious. She turned and saw him. "Ah! *Merci, Monsieur!* I tank you moch." "It's for me to thank you!" he stammered. The dark lady smiled. "I have the instinct," she said in her broken English, "for others—not for myself. I am unlucky. It is the first time you play, Sare? I tought so. Do not play again. Give me that promise; it will make me 'appy."

Her eyes were looking into his. Never in his life had he seen anything so fascinating as her face with its slightly teasing smile; her figure in the lacy black dress swinging out Spanish fashion from the hips, and the scarf flung about her shoulders. He had made the speech, then, which afterwards seemed to him so foreign.

"Charmed to promise anything that will make you happy, Madame."

She clasped her hands like a pleased child.

"That is a bargain; now I have repaid you."

"May I find your carriage?"

"I am walkin', Monsieur."

With desperate courage, he had murmured:

"Then may I escort you?"

"But certainly."

Sitting on his prayer-book, Trevillian burrowed into the past. What had he felt, thought, fancied, in those moments while she had gone to get her cloak? Who and what was she? Into what whirlpool drawing him? How nearly he had bolted—back to the idyllic, to Varvara's searching candour, and Katrina's laughing innocence, before she was there beside him, lace veiling her hair, face, eyes, like an Eastern woman, and her fingers had slipped under his sleeve. . . . What a walk! What sense of stepping into the unknown; strange intimacy, and perfect ignorance! Perhaps every man had some

such moment in his life—of pure romance; of adventuring at all and any cost! He had restrained the impulse to press that slender hand closely to his side, had struggled to preserve the perfect delicacy worthy of the touching confidence of so beautiful a lady. Italian, Spanish, Polish, Bohemian? Married, widowed? She told him nothing—he asked no questions. Instinct or shyness kept him dumb, but with a whirling brain. And the night above them had seemed the starriest ever seen, the sweetest scented, the most abandoned by all except himself and her. They had come to the gate of this very garden; and, opening it, she had said:

"Here is my home. You have been perfect for me, Monsieur."

Her lightly resting fingers were withdrawn. Trevillian remembered—with a sort of wonder—how he had kissed those fingers.

"I am always at your service, Madame."

Her lips had parted; her eyes had an arch sweetness he had never seen before or since in woman.

"Every night I play. *Au revoir!*"

He had listened to her footsteps on the path—watched lights go up in the house which looked so empty now behind him, watched them put out again; and, retracing his steps, had learned

by heart their walk from the Casino, till he was sure he could not miss his way to that garden gate by day or night. . . . A fluster of breeze came into the jungle where he sat, and released the dry rustle of the palm tree leaves. "*On fait des folies!*" as the French put it. Loose lot—the French! Queer, what young men would go through when they were "making madnesses." And, plucking a bit of lilac, old Trevillian put it to his nose, as though seeking explanation for the madnesses of youth. What had he been like then? Thin as a lath, sunburnt—he used to pride himself on being sunburnt—a little black moustache; a dandy about clothes! The memory of his youthful looks warmed him, sitting there, chilly from old age. . . .

"*On fait des folies!*" All next day, he had been restless, uneasy at the Villa Rostakov under the question in Varvara's eyes—and Lord knew what excuse he had made for not going there that evening! Ah! And what of his solemn resolutions to find out all about his dark lady, not to run his head into some foreign noose, not to compromise her or himself? They had all gone out of his head the moment he set eyes on her again, and he had never learned anything but her name, Iñez; in all those three weeks, nor told anything of himself—as if both had felt that knowledge

must destroy romance. When had he known himself of interest to her—the second night—the third? The look in her eyes; the pressure of her arm against his own! On this very seat, with his cloak spread to guard her from the chill, he had whispered his turbulent avowals! Not free! No such woman could be free. What did it matter? Disinheritance—Ostracism—Exile! All such considerations had burned like straws in the fire he had felt, sitting by her in the darkness, his arm about her, her shoulder pressed to his. With mournful mockery she had gazed at him, kissed his forehead, slipped away up the dark garden. God! What a night after that! Wandering, up and down, along by the sea—devoured! Funny to look back on—deuced funny! A woman's face to have such power! And with a little shock he remembered that never in all the few weeks of that mad business had he seen her face by daylight! Of course, he had left Mentone at once—no offering his madness up to the candid eyes of those two girls, to the cynical stare of that old *viveur* Rostakov! But no going home, though his leave was up; he was his own master yet awhile, thanks to his winnings. And then—the deluge! Literally—a night when the rain came down in torrents, drenching him through cape and clothes while he stood waiting for her. It was after that

drenching night which had kept them apart that she had returned his passion. . . . A wild young devil! the madness of those nights, beneath these trees by the old fountain! How he used to sit waiting on this bench in the darkness with heart fluttering, trembling, aching with expectancy! . . . Gad! how he had ached and fluttered on that seat! What fools young men could be! And yet, in all his life had there been weeks so wildly sweet as those? Weeks the madness of which could stir in him still this strange youthful warmth. Rubbing his veined thin hands together, he held them out into a streak of sunlight, and closed his eyes. . . . There, coming through the gate into the deeper shadow, dark in her black dress—always black—the gleam of her neck when she bent and pressed his head to it! Through the rustling palm leaves the extinct murmuring of their two voices, the beating of their two hearts. . . . Madness indeed! His back gave a little crick. He had been very free from lumbago lately! Confound it—a premonitory twinge! Close to his feet, a lizard rustled out into the patch of sunlight, motionless but for tongue and eyes, looked at him with head to one side—queer quick dried-looking little object! . . . And then—the end! What a Jezebel of cruelty he had thought her! Now he could see its wisdom and

its mercy. By George! She had blown their wild weeks out like a candle flame! Vanished! Vanished into the unknown as she had come from the unknown; left him to go, haggard and burnt-up, back to England and Bank routine, to the social and moral solidity of a pillar of society. . . .

Like that lizard whisking its tail and vanishing beneath the dead dry leaves, so she had vanished—as if into the earth. Could she ever have felt for him as he for her? Did women ever know such consuming fires? Trevillian shrugged his thin shoulders. She had seemed to; but—how tell? Queer cattle—women!

Two nights he had sat here—waiting—sick with anxiety and longing. A third day he had watched outside the villa, closed, shuttered, abandoned—not a sound from it, not a living thing, but one white and yellow cat. He pitied himself even now, thinking of that last vigil. For three days more he had hung around, haunting Casino, garden, villa—— No sign—no sign! . . .

Trevillian rose; his back had given him another twinge. He examined the seat and his open prayer-book. Had he overlapped it, on to damp stone? He frowned, smoothing superstitiously the pages a little creased and over-flattened by his weight. Closing the book he went towards the

gate. Had those passionate hours been the best or the worst of his life? He did not know.

He moved out into the hot sunshine and up the road. Round the corner he came suddenly abreast of the old villa. 'It was here I stood!' he thought: 'Just here.' What was that caterwauling! Ah! The girl and the organ—there they were again! What! Why! of course! That long-ago morning a barrel organ had come while he stood there in despair. He could see it still, grinding away, with a monkey on it, and a woman singing that same silly tune! With a dry dusty feeling he turned and walked on. What had he been thinking of before? Oh! Ah! The Rolfe woman, and that young fool Chesherford! Yes, he would certainly warn Agatha; certainly warn her! They were a loose lot out here!

1921.

XXXVI

BLACKMAIL

THE affectionate if rather mocking friend who had said of Charles Granter: "*Ce n'est pas un homme, c'est un bâtiment,*" seemed justified, to the thin dark man following him down Oakley Street, Chelsea, that early October afternoon. From the square foundations of his feet to his square fair beard and the top of his head under a square black bowler, he looked very big, solid as granite, indestructible—steel-clad, too, for his grey clothes increased his bulk in the mild sunlight; too big to be taken by the board—only fit to be submarined. And the man dodging in his wake right down to the Embankment, ran up once or twice under his counter and fell behind again, as if appalled by the vessel's size and unconsciousness. Considering the heat of the past summer, the plane-trees were still very green, and few of their twittering leaves had dropped or turned yellow—just enough to confirm the glamorous melancholy of early Fall. Granter, though he lived with his wife in some

Mansions close by, went out of his way to pass under those trees and look at the river. This seeming disclosure of sensibility, perhaps, determined the shadowy man to dodge up again and become stationary close behind. Ravaged and streaked, as if he had lived submerged, he stood carefully noting with his darting dark eyes that they two were quite alone; then, swallowing violently so that the strings of his lean neck writhed he moved stealthily up beside Granter, and said in a hurried, hoarse voice: "Beg pardon, Mister—ten pound, and I'll say nothin'."

The face which Granter turned towards that surprising utterance was a good illustration of the saying "And things are not what they seem." Above that big building of a body it quivered, ridiculously alive, and complex, as of a man full of nerves, humours, sarcasms; and a deep continuous chinking sound arose—of Charles Granter jingling coins in his trousers' pocket. The quiver settled into raised eyebrows, into crows feet running out on to the broad cheekbones, into a sarcastic smile drooping the corners of the lips between moustache and beard. He said in his rather high voice:

"What's the matter with you, my friend?"

"There's a lot the matter with me, Mister. Down and out I am. I know where you live, I

know your lady; but—ten pound and I'll say nothin'."

"About what?"

"About your visitin' that gell, where you've just come from. Ten pound. It's cheap—I'm a man of me word."

With lips, still sarcastically drooped, Granter made a little derisive sound.

Blackmail, by George!

"Come on, Guv'nor—I'm desperate, I mean to have that ten pound. You give it me here at six o'clock this evenin', if you 'aven't got it on you." His eyes flared suddenly in his hungry face. "But no tricks! I ain't killed Huns for nothin'."

Granter surveyed him for a moment, then turned his back and looked at the water.

"Well, you've got two hours to get it in—six o'clock, Mister; and no tricks—I warn you."

The hoarse voice ceased, the sound of footsteps died away; Granter was alone. The smile still clung to his lips, but he was not amused; he was annoyed, with the measured indignation of a big man highly civilised and innocent. Where had this ruffian sprung from? To be spied on, without knowing it, like this! His ears grew red. The damned scoundrel!

The thing was too absurd to pay attention to. And, instantly, his highly-sophisticated con-

sciousness began to pay attention. How many visits had he made to this distressed flower-girl? Three? And all because he didn't like handing over the case to that Society which always found out the worst. They said private charity was dangerous. Apparently it was! Blackmail! A consideration came, perching like a crow on the branches of his mind: why hadn't he mentioned the flower-girl to his wife, and made *her* do the visiting? Why! Because Olga would have said the girl was a fraud. And perhaps she was! A put-up job! Would the scoundrel have ventured on this threat at all if the girl were not behind him? She might support him with lies! His wife might believe them—— She—she had such a vein of cynicism! How sordid, how domestically unpleasant!

Granter felt quite sick. Every decent human value seemed suddenly in question. And a second crow came croaking. Could one leave a scoundrel like this to play his tricks with impunity? Oughtn't one to go to the Police? He stood extraordinarily still—a dappled leaf dropped from a plane-tree and lodged on his bowler hat; at the other end of him a little dog mistook him for a lamp-post. This was no joke! For a man with a reputation for humanity, integrity and commonsense—no joke at all! A Police Court meant the prosecution of a fellow-creature; getting him per-

haps a year's imprisonment, when one had always felt that punishment practically never fitted crime! Staring at the river, he seemed to see cruelty hovering over himself, his wife, Society, the flower-girl, even over that scoundrel—naked cruelty, waiting to pounce on one or-all. Whichever way one turned the thing was dirty, cruel. No wonder blackmail was accounted such a heinous crime. No other human act was so cold-blooded, spider-like, and slimy; none plunged so deadly a dagger into the bowels of compassion, so eviscerated humanity, so murdered faith! And it would have been worse, if his conscience had not been clear. But was it so extremely clear? Would he have taken the trouble to go to that flower-girl's dwelling, not once but three times, unless she had been attractive, unless her dark brown eyes had been pretty, and her common voice so soft? Would he have visited the blowsy old flower-woman at that other corner, in circumstances, no doubt, just as strenuous? His honesty answered: No. But his sense of justice added, that if he did like a pretty face, he was not vicious —he was fastidious and detested subterfuge. But then Olga was so cynical, she would certainly ask him why he hadn't visited the old flower-woman as well, and the lame man who sold matches, and all the other stray unfortunates of

the neighbourhood. Well, there it was; and a bold course always the best! But what was the bold course? To go to the Police? To his wife? To that girl, and find out if she were in this ramp? To wait till six o'clock, meet the ruffian, and shake the teeth out of him? Granter could not decide. All seemed equally bold—would do equally well. And a fifth course presented itself which seemed even bolder: Ignore the thing!

The tide had just turned, and the full waters below him were in suspense, of a sunlit soft grey colour. This stillness of the river restored to Charles Granter something of the impersonal mood in which he had crossed the Embankment to look at it. Here, by the mother stream of this great town, was he, tall, strong, well-fed, and, if not rich, quite comfortable; and here, too, were hundreds of thousands like that needy flower-girl and this shadowy scoundrel, skating on the edge of destitution. And here this water was—to him a source of æsthetic enjoyment—to them a possible last refuge. The girl had talked of it—beggar's patter, perhaps, like the blackmailer's words: "I'm desperate—I'm down and out."

One wanted to be just! If he had known all about them—but there it was, he knew nothing!

'I can't believe she's such an ungrateful little

wretch!' he thought; 'I'll go back and see her again.' . . .

He retraced his way up Oakley Street to the Mews which she inhabited, and, ascending a stairway scented with petrol, knocked on a half-open door, whence he could see her baby, of doubtful authorship, seated in an empty flower-basket—a yellow baby, who stared up at him with the placidity of one recently fed. That stare seemed to Granter to be saying: "You look out that you're not taken for my author. Have you got an alibi, old man?" And almost unconsciously he began to calculate where he had been about fourteen or fifteen months ago. Not in London—thank goodness! in Brittany with his wife—all that July, August, and September. Jingling his money, he contemplated the baby. It seemed more, but it *might* be only four months old! The baby opened its mouth in a toothless smile. "Ga!" it said, and stretched out a tiny hand. Granter ceased to jingle the coins and gazed round the room. The first time he came, a month ago, to test her street-corner story, its condition had been deplorable. His theory that people were never better than their environments had prompted the second visit, and that of this afternoon. He had, he told himself, wanted to know that he was not throwing away his money.

And there certainly was some appearance of comfort now in a room so small that he and the baby and a bed almost filled it. But the longer he contemplated them, the greater fool he felt for ever having come there even with those best intentions which were the devil. And, turning to go, he saw the girl herself coming up the stairs, with a paper bag in her hand and an evident bull's-eye in her mouth, for a scent of peppermint preceded her. Surely her cheekbones were higher than he had thought, her eyebrows more oblique—a gipsy look! Her eyes, dark and lustrous as a hound puppy's, smiled at him, and he said in his rather high voice:

"I came back to ask you something."

"Yes, Sir."

"Do you know a dark man with a thin face and a slight squint, who's been in the Army?"

"What's his name, Sir?"

"I don't know; but he followed me from here, and tried to blackmail me on the Embankment. You know what blackmail is?"

"No, Sir."

Feline, swift, furtive, she had passed him and taken up her baby, slanting her dark glance at him from behind it. Granter's eyes were very round just then, the corners of his mouth very drawn down. He was experiencing a most queer

sensation. Really it was as if—though he disliked poetic emphasis—as if he had suddenly seen something pre-civilised, pre-human, snake-like, cat-like, monkey-like too, in those dark sliding eyes and that yellow baby. Sure, as he stood there, she was in it; or, if not in it, she knew of it!

"A dangerous game, that," he said. "Tell him—for his own good—he had better drop it."

And, while he went, very square, downstairs, he thought: 'This is one of the finest opportunities you ever had for getting to the bottom of human nature, and you're running away from it.' So strongly did this thought obsess him, that he halted, in two minds, outside. A chauffeur, who was cleaning his car, looked at him curiously. Charles Granter moved away.

II

When he reached the little drawing-room of their flat, his wife was making tea. She was rather short, with a good figure, and brown eyes in a flattish face, powdered and by no means unattractive. She had Slav blood in her—Polish; and Granter never now confided to her the finer shades of his thoughts and conduct because she had long made him feel he was her superior in moral sensibility. He had no wish to feel superior

—it was often very awkward; but he could not help it. In view of this attempt at blackmail, it was more than awkward. For it is extraordinarily unpleasant to fall from a pedestal on which you do not wish to be.

He sat down, very large, in a lacquered chair with black cushions, spoke of the leaves turning, saw her look at him and smile, and felt that she knew he was disturbed.

"Do you ever wonder," he said, tinkling his tea-spoon, "about the lives that other people live?"

"What sort of people, Charles?"

"Oh—not our sort; matchsellers, don't you know, flowersellers, people down and out?"

"No, I don't think I do."

If only he could tell her of this monstrous incident without slipping from his pedestal!

"It interests me enormously; there are such queer depths to reach, don't you know?"

Her smile seemed to answer: 'You don't reach the depths in me.' And it was true. She was very Slav, with the warm gleam in her eyes and the opaque powdered skin of her flat comely face. An enigma—flatly an enigma! There were deep waters below the pedestal, like—like Phylæ, with columns still standing in the middle of the Nile Dam. Absurd!

"I've often wondered," he said, "how I should feel if I were down and out."

"You? You're too large, Charles, and too dignified, my dear; you'd be on the Civil List before you could turn round." Granter rose from the lacquered chair, jingling his coins. The most vivid pictures at that moment were, like a film, unrolled before his mind—of the grey sunlit river, and that accosting blackguard with his twisted murky face, and lips uttering hoarse sounds; of the yellow baby, and the girl's gipsy-dark glance from behind it; of a Police Court, and himself standing there and letting the whole cart-load of the Law fall on them. And he said suddenly:

"I was blackmailed this afternoon, on the Embankment."

She did not answer, and turning with irritation, he saw that her fingers were in her ears.

"I do wish you wouldn't jingle your money so!" she said.

Confound it! She had not heard him.

"I've had an adventure," he began again. "You know the flower-girl who stands at that corner in Tite Street?"

"Yes; a gipsy baggage."

"H'm! Well, I bought a flower from her one day, and she told me such a pathetic story that I went to her den to see if it was true. It seemed all

right, so I gave her some money, don't you know? Then I thought I'd better see how she was spending it, so I went to see her again, don't you know?"

A faint "Oh! Charles!" caused him to hurry on.

"And—what d'you think—a blackguard followed me today and tried to blackmail me for ten pounds on the Embankment."

A sound brought his face round to attention. His wife was lying back on the cushions of her chair in paroxysms of soft laughter.

It was clear to Granter, then, that what he had really been afraid of was just this. His wife would laugh at him—laugh at him slipping from the pedestal! Yes! it was that he had dreaded—not any disbelief in his fidelity. Somehow he felt too large to be laughed at. He *was* too large! Nature had set a size beyond which husbands——!

"I don't see what there is to laugh at!" he said frigidly; "there's no more odious crime than blackmail."

His wife was silent; two tears were trickling down her cheeks.

"Did you give it him?" she said in an extinguished voice.

"Of course not."

"What was he threatening?"

"To tell you."

"But what?"

"His beastly interpretation of my harmless visits."

The tears had made runlets in her powder, and he added viciously: "He doesn't know you, of course."

His wife dabbed her eyes, and a scent of geranium arose.

"It seems to me," said Granter, "that you'd be even more amused if there were something in it!"

"Oh! no, Charles, but—perhaps there is."

Granter looked at her fixedly.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, there is not."

He saw her cover her lips with that rag of handkerchief, and abruptly left the room.

He went into his study and sat down before the fire. So it was funny to be a faithful husband? And suddenly he thought: 'If my wife can treat this as a joke, what—what about herself?' A nasty thought! An unconscionable thought! Really, it was as though that blackmailing scoundrel had dirtied human nature, till it seemed to function only from low motives. A church clock chimed. Six already! The ruffian would be back there on the Embankment, waiting for his ten pounds. Granter rose. His duty was to go out and hand him over to the Police.

'No!' he thought viciously, 'let him come

here! I'd very much like him to come here. I'd teach him!'

But a sort of shame beset him. Like most very big men, he was quite unaccustomed to violence —had never struck a blow in his life, not even in his school-days—had never had occasion to. He went across to the window. From there he could just see the Embankment parapet through the trees, in the failing light, and presently—sure enough—made out the fellow's figure slinking up and down like a hungry dog. And he stood, watching, jingling his money—nervous, sarcastic, angry, very interested. What would the rascal do now? Would he beard this great block of flats? And was the girl down there too—the girl, with her yellow baby? He saw the slinking figure cross from the far side and vanish under the loom of the Mansions. In that interesting moment Granter burst through the bottom of one of his trousers pockets: several coins jingled on to the floor and rolled away. He was still looking for the last when he heard the door-bell ring—he had never really believed the ruffian would come up! Straightening himself abruptly, he went out into the hall. Service was performed by the Mansions staff, so there was no one in the flat but himself and his wife. The bell rang again, and she, too, appeared.

"This is my Embankment friend who amuses you so much. I should like you to see him," he said grimly. He noted a quizzical apology on her face and opened the hall door.

Yes! there stood the man! By electric light, in upholstered surroundings, more "down and out" than ever. A bad lot, but a miserable poor wretch, with his broken boots, his thin, twisted, twitching face, his pinched shabby figure—only his hungry eyes looked dangerous.

"Come in," said Granter. "You want to see my wife, I think."

The man recoiled.

"I don't want to see 'er," he muttered, "unless you force me to. Give us *five* pound, Guv'nor, and I won't worry you again. I don't want to cause trouble between man and wife."

"Come in," repeated Granter; "she's expecting you."

The man stood, silently passing a pale tongue over a pale upper lip, as though conjuring some new resolution from his embarrassment.

"Now, see 'ere, Mister," he said suddenly, "you'll regret it if I come in—you will, straight."

"I shall regret it if you don't. You're a very interesting fellow, and an awful scoundrel."

"Well, who made me one?" the man burst out; "you answer me that."

"Are you coming in?"

"Yes, I am."

He came, and Granter shut the door behind him. It was like inviting a snake or a mad dog into one's parlour; but the memory of having been laughed at was so fresh within him, that he rather welcomed the sensation.

"Now," he said, "have the kindness!" and opened the drawing-room door.

The man slunk in, blinking in the stronger light.

Granter went towards his wife, who was standing before the fire.

"This gentleman has an important communication to make to you, it seems."

The expression of her face struck him as peculiar—surely she was not frightened! And he experienced a kind of pleasure in seeing them both look so exquisitely uncomfortable.

"Well," he said ironically, "perhaps you'd like me not to listen." And, going back to the door, he stood leaning against it with his hands up to his ears. He saw the fellow give him a furtive look and go nearer to her; his lips moved rapidly, hers answered, and he thought: 'What on earth am I covering my ears for?' As he took his hands away, the man turned round and said:

"I'm goin' now, Mister; a little mistake—sorry to 'ave troubled you."

His wife had turned to the fire again; and with a puzzled feeling Granter opened the door. As the fellow passed, he took him by the arm, twisted him round into the study, and, locking the door, put the key into his pocket.

"Now, then," he said, "you precious scoundrel!"

The man shifted on his broken boots. "Don't you hit me, Guv'nor. I got a knife here."

"I'm not going to hit you. I'm going to hand you over to the Police."

The man's eyes roved, looking for a way of escape, then rested, as if fascinated, on the glowing hearth.

"What's ten pound?" he said suddenly. "You'd never ha' missed it."

Granter smiled.

"You don't seem to realise, my friend, that blackmail is the most devilish crime a man can commit." And he crossed over to the telephone.

The man's eyes, dark, restless, violent, and yet hungry, began to shift up and down the building of a man before him.

"No," he said suddenly, with a sort of pathos, "don't do that, Guv'nor!"

Something—the look of his eyes or the tone of his voice—affected Granter.

"But if I don't," he said, slowly, "you'll be blackmailing the next person you meet. You're as dangerous as a viper."

The man's lips quivered; he covered them with his hand, and said from behind it:

"I'm a man like yourself. I'm down and out—that's all. Look at me!"

Granter's glance dwelt on the trembling hand. "Yes, but you fellows destroy all belief in human nature," he said, vehemently.

"See 'ere, Guv'nor; you try livin' like me—you try it! My Gawd! You try my life these last six months—cadgin' and crawlin' for a job!" He made a deep sound. "A man 'oo's done 'is bit, too. Wot life is it? A stinkin' life, not fit for a dawg, let alone a 'uman bein'. An' when I see a great big chap like you, beggin' your pardon, Mister—well fed, with everything to 'is 'and—it was regular askin' for it. It come over me, it did."

"No, no," said Granter, grimly; "that won't do. It couldn't have been sudden. You calculated—you concocted this. Blackmail is sheer filthy cold-blooded blackguardism. You don't care two straws whom you hurt, whose lives you wreck, what faiths you destroy." And he put his hand on the receiver.

The man squirmed.

"Steady on, Guv'nor! I've gotta find food. I've gotta find clothes. I can't live on air. I can't go naked."

Granter stood motionless, while the man's voice continued to travel to him across the cosy room.

"Give us a chawnce, Guv-nor! Ah! give us a chawnce! You can't understand my temptations. Don't 'ave the police to me. I won't do this again —give you me word—so 'elp me! I've got it in the neck. Let me go, Guv'nor!"

In Granter, motionless as the flats he lived in, a really heavy struggle was in progress—not between duty and pity, but between revengeful anger and a sort of horror at using the strength of prosperity against so broken a wretch.

"Let me go, Mister!" came the hoarse voice again. "Be a sport!"

Granter dropped the receiver, and unlocked the door.

"All right; you can go."

The man crossed swiftly.

"Christ!" he said; "good luck! And as to the lady—I take it back. I never see 'er. It's all me eye."

He was across the hall and gone before Granter could say a word; the scurrying shuffle of his foot-

steps down the stairs died away. "And as to the lady—I take it back—I never see her. It's all me eye!" Good God! The scoundrel, having failed with him, had been trying to blackmail his wife—his wife, who had laughed at his fidelity!—his wife who had looked—frightened! "All me eye!" Her face started up before Granter—*scared* under its powder, with a mask drawn over it. And he had let that scoundrel go! Scared! That was the meaning!... Blackmail—of all poisonous human actions!... His wife!... But... What now...!

1921.

XXXVII

STROKE OF LIGHTNING

THIS was before the war, and conditions were such that the tragedies and comedies of our private lives seemed still to have importance.

I had not seen my friend Frank Weymouth for some years, before coming across him and his wife that Christmas at the big hotel in Heliopolis. He was always a sunny fellow with a spilt-wine look about him, which not even a house-mastership at a Public School had been able to overcome: his wife, whom I had only met twice before, surprised me a little. I remembered a quiet, rather dark, little person with a doubting eye; but this was a very kitten of a woman, brimful of mischief and chaff, and always on the go—reaction, no doubt, from the enforced decorum of a house where she was foster-mother of forty boys, in an atmosphere of being under glass, and the scrutiny of intensive propriety. In our Egyptian hotel, with its soft, clever Berberine servants, its

huge hall, palm-garden and cosmopolitan guests, its golf-course with little dark, scurrying Arab caddies, and the desert at its doors, JessieWeymouth frolicked and rolled her large dark eyes, scratched and caressed us with her little paws. Life had suddenly got into her, and left its tail outside for her to chase. She dragged us all along in her gay pursuit of it; and Weymouth roused my admiration by his smiling acquiescence in her outrageous "goings-on." He knew, I suppose, that she was devoted to him, and her bark no bite. His "term" had been a hard one; he was in a mood of lying-back, physically run down, mentally flattened out. To soak in idleness and the sun was all he seemed to care about.

I forget who first conceived our desert trip, but it was Jessie Weymouth who fostered it. The Weymouths were not rich, and a desert trip costs money. They, myself, and a certain Breconridge couple had agreed to combine, when the Breconridges were suddenly summoned home by their daughter's illness. Jessie Weymouth danced with disappointment. "I shall die if we don't go now," she cried; "we simply must scare up somebody."

We scared up the Radolins—an Austrian couple in our hotel whom we had been meeting casually after dinner. He was a Count, in a Bank at Constantinople, and she, I think, the daughter

of a Viennese painter. They used to interest me from being so very much the antithesis of the Weymouths. He was making the most of his holiday, dancing, playing golf, riding; while she seemed extraordinarily listless, pale, and, as it were, dragged along by her lively husband. I would notice her lounging alone in the gorgeous hall, gazing apparently at nothing. I could not make up my mind about her looks. Her figure was admirable, so were her eyes—ice-green, with dark lashes. But that air of tired indifference seemed to spoil her face. I remember doubting whether it were not going to spoil our trip. But Jessie Weymouth could not be denied, and Radolin, we all admitted, was good company.

We started, then, from Mena House, like all desert excursionists, on New Year's Day. We had only a fortnight before us, for the Weymouths were due back in England on the twentieth.

Our dragoman was a merry scoundrel by disposition and an Algerian Bedouin by race. Besides him we had twelve Arabs, a Greek cook, seven camels, four donkeys and five tents. We took the usual route for the Fayoum. I remember our start so well. In front, Jessie Weymouth on a silver-grey donkey, and our scoundrel on his pet camel. Then Radolin, Weymouth and I on the other three donkeys, and Hélène Radolin perched

up, remote and swaying, on the other riding camel. The pack camels had gone on ahead. All day we dawdled along, following the river towards Samara, where we camped that night at a due distance from the evil-smelling village. I had the middle tent, Weymouths to my right, Radolins to my left. Everything was well done by our merry scoundrel, and dinner, thanks to him, Jessie Weymouth and Radolin, a lively enough feast. Still, these first three days, skirting cultivation, were disappointing. But on the fourth we were well out on the lonely sands and the desert air had begun to go to our heads. That night we camped among bare hills under a wonderful starry sky, cold and clear as crystal. Our scoundrel surpassed himself at dinner; Jessie Weymouth and Radolin were like madcaps, Weymouth his old sunny self. Only Hélène Radolin preserved her languor; not offensively, but as though she had lost the habit of gaiety. That night I made up my mind, however, that she really was a beautiful woman. The long days in the sun had given her colour, taken the tired look out of her face; and at least twice during the evening I caught Weymouth's eyes fixed on her as if he, too, had made that discovery.

The pranks of Jessie Weymouth and Radolin reached their limit at dinner, and they finished

by rushing out into the night to the top of a neighbouring hillock.

Sitting in my tent doorway, counting the stars, I was joined by our scoundrel. The fellow had been in England and knew about Western freedom and the manners of our women.

"She certainly is a good one, Mrs. Weymut," he said to me. "Mr. Weymut a very quiet man. I think he will be tired of her flirts, but he never say nothing—too bloody gentle. The Count he is a good one too, but the Countess—ah! she made of ice! We get some fresh fruit to-morrow at the Fayoum." He went on to his men, two hundred yards away among the camels.

It was wonderfully silent. The light from stars and a half-moon powdered the sands; no wind at all, yet deliciously cold—the desert in good mood; no influence quite so thrilling to pulses, yet so cooling to fevers; no sound, no movement in all the night!

"Isn't it heavenly? Good-night!"

Hélène Radolin was passing me in her fur. The look on her face, the movement of her body, seemed to belong to the lonely silence. She went into her tent. I sat on, smoking. And presently, outside the dining tent, I saw Weymouth, his head thrown back, drawing in deep breaths. By the light of the lantern over the tent door, he had

a look as if inspired by a curious happy wonder. Then he too went to his tent. Ten minutes later the madcaps returned, Mrs. Weymouth in front, very quiet; her face, indeed, wore a rather mortified expression, as if she had fallen a little in her own estimation. They went into their tents, and I heard voices a moment, to left and right; then the stillness and the powdering light enveloped all.

Next day, bored with donkey-riding, I walked with the Arabs and saw little of my companions. Weymouth and the Countess, I think, were on the two riding camels, Radolin and Mrs. Weymouth on their donkeys. We came to the edge of the Fayoum about five o'clock. That camping ground was narrow. In tents, when jammed together, one can't avoid hearing at least the tone of neighbouring talk, and I was struck by a certain acrimony in the Weymouth tent. Jessie Weymouth seemed complaining that Frank hadn't spoken to her all day.

"I suppose," she said, "you didn't like my running out with Countie last night?"

Weymouth's voice, quite good-humoured, answered:

"Oh! not a bit; why should I mind?"

By the ensuing silence I seemed to realise that Jessie Weymouth was disappointed. Perhaps I

hadn't really a feeling of suspense that evening, but, in reminiscence, it seems to me I had. Dinner was certainly a disharmonic feast: little Mrs. Weymouth audacious and rueful. Weymouth and the Countess subdued, Radolin artificial; our scoundrel and myself had to make the running. That fellow was needle-sharp, though not always correct in his conclusions.

"Mrs. Weymut got a fly in her little eye," he said to me as I was turning in. "I make it all right to-morrow; I get a dancer at Sennourès. Oho, she is a good one! She make the married couples 'appy. We get some fresh eggs too."

Severe silence in the tents to right and left that night!

A whole day's travelling through the crops of the Fayoum brought us to the camping ground outside Sennourès, among a grove of palm trees —charming spot but lacking the clear, cold spirituality of the desert night.

The dancer was certainly "a good one." What a baggage—all lithe, supple enticement, and jangle of shivering beads! The excitement of the Arabs, the shocked goggling eyes of Jessie Weymouth—quite a little Puritan when it came to the point!—the laughter of our scoundrel, Hélène Radolin's aloofness, which kept even that

daughter of Egypt in her place, were what impressed me during the performance.

Towards the end the Egyptian made a dead set at Weymouth, and getting nothing out of him except his smile, became quite cross. Leaning down to our scoundrel and slinking her eyes round at the Countess, she murmured something malicious. Our laughing scoundrel patted her, and we broke up. In ten minutes our camp was empty—dancer, Arabs, all had gone off to the village. I went out and stood in darkness among the palm trees, listening to the shivering of their leaves.

Inside the dining tent Radolin was playing the guitar. The sound was soothing after the vibrant Arab music. Presently I saw Weymouth come out of the tent. He stood under the lamp at the entrance, looking back, his face was fully lighted for me, but invisible, I think, to those within. I shall never forget the look on it. Adoration incarnate!

'Hallo!' I thought, 'what's this?' And just then Hélène Radolin came out too. She passed him quietly; he did not attempt to speak or follow; but she saw. Oh! yes, she saw; then vanished into her tent. And Weymouth stood, rooted, as if struck by lightning, while, on and on, behind him rose the thrum of that guitar and all around

us the shivering of the palm leaves in a gusty breeze.

Quite the custom, I believe, in these days to laugh at this sort of thing—at such sudden leaps of an irresponsible force; to suggest that they are old-fashioned, overrated—literary, in fact. The equality of the sexes—they say—the tendency of women towards brains and trousers, have diminished Venus; and yet, I fancy what happened to my friend Weymouth may still happen to young gentlemen who talk as if love had no fevers and no proprietary instincts; as if, when you burn for a woman, you are willing to leave her to another, or share her with him without fuss. Of course there are men who have no blood in their veins; but my friend Weymouth unfortunately had; not for nothing was the sunny, spilt-wine look about his hair and cheeks and dark-blue eyes.

For the rest of our desert trip the situation hopelessly promoted that adoration. Little Jessie Weymouth certainly did her best to help. She was the only one of us blind to what had happened. Her perceptions, you see, were blunted by the life of strenuous duty which she and Weymouth led in term time, and by the customary exhaustion of her husband during the holidays. She could not imagine him otherwise than sober. But now—if ever a man were drunk! The thing

became so patent that it was quite painful to see her continued blindness. Not till sunset of the second day, with the Fayoum behind us, in our high camp on the desert's edge, did she sense her tragedy. *Those two* were sitting in camp chairs close together, watching the sun go down. Our Arabs, presented with a ram to soothe their grief at abandoning the joys of the Fayoum, were noisily preparing the animal to the idea of being eaten. Our scoundrel and Radolin were absent; I was sketching; Jessie Weymouth lying down in her tent. Those two were alone—their faces turned towards each other, their hands, perhaps, touching. A strange violet was in the light over the bare hills: how much they saw of it, I know not, nor what they were saying to each other, when Jessie Weymouth came out of her tent, stretching and yawning, and, like the kitten she was, went stealing up behind, to startle them. Three yards away, unseen, unheard, I saw her stop. Her lips opened, her eyes went wide with amazement. Suddenly she covered them with her hands, turned round and stole back into her tent.

Five minutes later out she came again, with bright, hard spots of colour in her cheeks. I saw her run up to them, her feverish attempts at gaiety; and that to those two she simply did not exist. We none of us existed for them. They had

found a world of their own, and we were shadows in the unreal world which they had left. You know the pink-flowered daphne, the scent of whose blossoms is very sweet, heavy, and slightly poisonous; sniff it too much and a kind of feverish fire will seize on you. Those two had sniffed the daphne!

Walls have a singular value for civilised beings. In my thin tent between the thin tents of those two couples, prevented by lack of walls from any outlet to their feelings, I seemed to hear the smothered reproaches, the smothered longings. It was the silence of those two suddenly stricken lovers that was so impressive. I, literally, did not dare to speak to Weymouth while we were all mixed up like that. This English schoolmaster had lost, as if by magic, all power of seeing himself as others saw him. Not that those two "carried on"—nothing so normal; they just seemed to have stepped into quiet oblivion of everything but each other.

Even our scoundrel was puzzled. "In my house, when my wife behave bad, I beat her," he said to me; "when I behave bad she scratch my face." But there it was—we had no walls; Hélène Radolin could not be beaten, Weymouth could not have his face scratched. It was most awkward.

Things come to an end, and I never breathed more freely than when Mena House delivered us from that frightful close companionship.

As if by common consent, we dined at separate tables. After dinner I said to Weymouth:

"Come up and see the Sphinx by moonlight."

He came, still in his dream. We reached the Sphinx in silence, and sat down over against her on the sand. At last I said:

"What are you going to do now, old man?"

"I can't leave her." It was as if we had discussed the thing a dozen times already.

"But you have to be back on the twentieth?"

"I know."

"My dear fellow, it's ruination. And Jessie?"

"She must do what she likes."

"This is madness, Frank!"

"Perhaps. I can't go; that's all."

"What about *her?*"

"I don't know. I only know that where she goes, I must."

I just sat staring at the blunt shadow of the Sphinx's broken profile on the moonlit sand. The strange actionless, desert love-dream was at an end indeed! Something definite—horrible, perhaps—must happen now! And I stammered out:

"For God's sake, old boy, think of your wife,

your work, yourself—be reasonable! It isn't worth it, really!"

"Perhaps not. This has nothing to do with reason."

From a master at an English Public School the remark appeared to me fantastic. And, suddenly, he got up, as if he had been bitten. He was realising suddenly the difference that walls make. His face had a tortured look. The woman he loved, walled up with the man she had married! Behind us the desert, hundreds of miles of clean, savage sand, and in it we humans—tame and spiritual! Before us walls, and we humans—savage, carnal again! Queer! I doubt if he saw the irony; but he left me sitting there and went hurrying back to the hotel.

I stayed on a little with the riddle of the Ages, feeling it simple compared with this riddle of the moment. Then I followed him down. Would it resolve itself in terms of L.s.d.? After all, these four people had to live—could they afford to play fast and loose with the realities? Hélène Radolin had no money, I knew; Weymouth his mastership and a few hundreds saved; Jessie Weymouth a retired Colonel for a father; Radolin his banking partnership.

A night of walls had its effect. Radolin took his wife back to Heliopolis next day. The Wey-

mouths remained at Mena House: in three days they were due to sail.

I well remember thinking: 'There, you see, it doesn't do to exaggerate. This was a desert mirage and will pass like one. People are *not* struck by lightning!' But in a mood of morbid curiosity I went out to Heliopolis.

In the tramcar on the way I felt a sort of disappointment—Hélène Radolin was a Roman Catholic, Frank Weymouth an English gentleman. The two facts put such a stopper on what I wanted stopped. And we all have a sneaking love for the romantic, or—shall we say?—dramatic.

Well! The Radolins were gone. They had started that morning for Constantinople. In the oriental hall where all this had begun, I sat, browsing over my Turkish coffee, seeing again my friend Weymouth, languid and inert; his little wife's flirtatious liveliness; Radolin so *debonair;* Hélène Radolin, silent, her ice-green eyes slightly reddened in the lids as if she had been crying. The white-garbed Berberines slipped by; Greek gentlemen entertained their dubious ladies; Germans raised a guttural racket; the orchestra twanged out the latest tango. Nothing was changed but those figures of my vision. And suddenly one of them materialised—Weymouth was

standing as if lost, where the lobby opened into the hall. From his face it was clear to me that he knew they were gone; before I could join him he went out hastily. I am sorry now that I did not follow.

That evening at Mena House I was just beginning to undress when Jessie Weymouth tapped on my door.

"Have you seen Frank?"

I told her where I had seen him in the afternoon.

"That woman!" she cried. "He's not come back."

I assured her that the Radolins were gone away home. She stared at me and began to cry. She cried and cried, and I did not try to stop her. She was not only desolate and miserable, but bitter and angry. 'So long as she can be angry,' I thought, 'she'll get over it. One is not angry under a death-blow.'

At last she had cried her misery out, but not her anger or dismay. What was she to do? I tried to persuade her that Frank would turn up in time for them to start to-morrow evening. He was probably trying to work the thing out of his system; she must look on it as a fever, a kind of illness. She laughed wildly, scornfully, and went out.

Weymouth did not turn up, but the morning brought me a letter, enclosing a cheque for £300, a note to his wife, and a sealed envelope addressed to the headmaster of his Public School.

The letter to me ran as follows:—

"Old man, I admit that I am behaving like a cad; but it's either this or the sweet waters of oblivion; and there's less scandal this way. I have made up some story for my chief, please post it. The cheque is for all my substance except some fifty pounds. Take care of it for my wife; she'll get another five hundred, about, out of the turnover of our house. She will go to her father, no doubt, and forget me, I hope. Do, please, like a good fellow, see her safely on board. It's not likely that I shall ever come back to England. The future is quite dark, but where *she* is there I must be. Poste restante Constantinople will find me, so far as I know at present. Good-bye and bless you. Your affectionate F. W."

I did see Jessie Weymouth on board her ship, and a precious job it was.

A week later I, too, started for Constantinople, partly because I had promised Mrs. Weymouth, partly because I could not reconcile myself to the vision of my friend in the grip of his passion, without a job, almost without money.

The Radolins inhabited an old house on the far shore almost opposite the Rumeli Hissar. I called on them without warning, and found Hélène Radolin alone. In a room all Turkish stuffs and shadowy lights, she looked very different from her desert self. She had regained her pale languor, but her face had a definite spirit, lacking when I first saw her. She spoke quite freely.

"I love him; but it is madness. I have tried to send him away; but he will not go. You see, I am a Catholic; my religion means much to me. I must not go away with him. Take him back to England with you; I cannot bear to see him ruin his life like this for me."

I confess to looking at her with the wonder whether it was religion or the lack of L.s.d.

"Ah!" she said: "You don't understand; you think I am afraid of poverty with him. No! I am afraid of losing my soul, and his."

The way she said that was extraordinarily impressive. I asked her if she saw him.

"Yes; he comes. I have to let him. I cannot bear the look on his face when I say 'no.'" She gave me his address.

He had a garret in a little Greek hotel just above Galata—a ramshackle place, chosen for its cheapness. He did not seem surprised to see me. But I was startled. His face, shrunken and lined,

had a bitter, burnt-up look, which deepened the set and colour of his eyes till they looked almost black. A long bout of disease will produce just that effect.

"If she didn't love me," he said, "I could bear it. But she does. Well! So long as I can see her, I shall stand it; and she'll come—she'll come to me at last."

I repeated her words to me; I spoke of his wife, of England—no memory, no allusion, no appeal touched him.

I stayed a month and saw him nearly every day; I did not move him by one jot. At the end of that month I should never have known him for the Frank Weymouth who had started out with us from Mena House on New Year's Day. Changed! He was! I had managed to get him a teaching job through a man I knew at the Embassy—a poor enough job—a bare subsistence. And watching my friend day by day, I began to have a feeling of hatred for that woman. Yet I knew that her refusal to indulge their passion was truly religious. She really did see her lost soul and his, whirling entwined through purgatory like the souls of Paolo and Francesca in Watts' picture. Call it superstition, or what you will, her scruples were entirely genuine, and, from a certain point of view, quite laudable.

As for Radolin, he took it all precisely as if there were nothing to take; smooth and *debonnair* as ever—a little harder about the mouth and eyes, and that was all.

The morning before I went home I made my way once more up the evil-smelling stairs to my friend's garret. He was standing at the window, looking down over the bridge—that tragic bridge of Galata where unfortunates used to trade, perhaps still trade, the sight of their misfortunes. We stood there side by side.

"Frank," I said, "do you ever look at yourself in the glass? This can't go on."

No smile can be so bitter as a smile that used to be sunny.

"So long as I can see her, I shall last out."

"You surely don't want a woman to feel she's lost her soul, and is making you lose yours? She's perfectly sincere, in that."

"I know. I've given up asking. So long as I can see her, that's all."

It was mania!

That afternoon I took a boat over to the Radolins. It was April—the first real day of Spring, balmy and warm. The Judas trees of the Rumeli Hissar were budding, the sun laying on the water the tints of opal; and all the strange city of mosques and minarets, Western commerce and

Oriental beggary, was wonderfully living under that first Spring sun. I brought my boat up to the Radolins' landing stage, and got out. I mounted the steps, greened over by the wash of the water, and entered their little garden courtyard. I had never come this way before, and stood for a moment looking through the mimosas and bougainvilleas for a door that would satisfy formality. There was a grille to the left, but to reach it I would have to pass in front of the wide ground-floor window, whence I had sometimes looked out over the water to the Rumeli Hissar. My shoes made no noise on the marble path, but what I saw in the room stopped me from trying to pass.

Hélène Radolin was sitting perfectly still in a low chair sideways to the window, her hands on her lap, her eyes fixed on the tiled floor, where a streak of sunlight fell. In the curve of her grand piano, resting his elbows on it, Weymouth was leaning back, equally still, gazing down at her. That was all. But the impression I received of life arrested, of frozen lava, was in a way terrible. I stole back down the steps into my boat, and out on to the opal-tinted waters.

I have nothing more to tell you of this business. The war came down on us all soon after. Rumours I have heard, but know nothing, as they

say, of my own knowledge. Yet it has seemed to me worth while to set down this record of a "stroke of lightning," in days when people laugh at such absurdities.

1921.

XXXVIII

THE BROKEN BOOT

THE actor, Gilbert Caister, who had been "out" for six months, emerged from his East coast seaside lodging about noon in the day, after the opening of "Shooting the Rapids," on tour, in which he was playing Dr. Dominick in the last act. A salary of four pounds a week would not, he was conscious, remake his fortunes, but a certain jauntiness had returned to the gait and manner of one employed again at last.

Fixing his monocle, he stopped before a fishmonger's and, with a faint smile on his face, regarded a lobster. Ages since he had eaten a lobster! One could long for a lobster without paying, but the pleasure was not solid enough to detain him. He moved upstreet and stopped again, before a tailor's window. Together with the actual tweeds, in which he could so easily fancy himself refitted, he could see a reflection of himself, in the faded brown suit wangled out of the production of "Marmaduke Mandeville" the year before the war. The sunlight in this damned town was very

strong, very hard on seams and buttonholes, on knees and elbows! Yet he received the ghost of æsthetic pleasure from the reflected elegance of a man long fed only twice a day, of an eyeglass well rimmed out from a soft brown eye, of a velour hat salved from the production of "Educating Simon" in 1912; and, in front of the window he removed that hat, for under it was his new phenomenon, not yet quite evaluated, his *mêche blanche*. Was it an asset, or the beginning of the end? It reclined backwards on the right side, conspicuous in his dark hair, above that shadowy face always interesting to Gilbert Caister. They said it came from atrophy of the—something nerve, an effect of the war, or of under-nourished tissue. Rather distinguished, perhaps, but——!

He walked on, and became conscious that he had passed a face he knew. Turning, he saw it also turned on a short and dapper figure—a face rosy, bright, round, with an air of cherubic knowledge, as of a getter-up of amateur theatricals.

Bryce-Green, by George!

"Caister? It is! Haven't seen you since you left the old camp. Remember what sport we had over 'Gotta-Grampus'? By Jove! I am glad to see you. Doing anything with yourself? Come and have lunch with me."

Bryce-Green, the wealthy patron, the moving spirit of entertainment in that South coast convalescent camp. And, drawling slightly, Caister answered:

"I shall be delighted." But within him something did not drawl: "By God, you're going to have a feed, my boy!"

And—elegantly threadbare, roundabout and dapper—the two walked side by side.

"Know this place? Let's go in here! Phyllis, cocktails for my friend Mr. Caister and myself, and caviare on biscuits. Mr. Caister is playing here; you must go and see him."

The girl who served the cocktails and the caviare looked up at Caister with interested blue eyes. Precious!—he had been "out" for six months!

"Nothing of a part," he drawled; "took it to fill a gap." And below his waistcoat the gap echoed: "Yes, and it'll take some filling."

"Bring your cocktail along, Caister; we'll go into the little further room, there'll be nobody there. What shall we have—a lobstah?"

And Caister murmured: "I love lobstahs."

"Very fine and large here. And how are you, Caister? So awfully glad to see you—only real actor we had."

"Thanks," said Caister, "I'm all right." And he

thought: 'He's a damned amateur, but a nice little man.'

"Sit here. Waiter, bring us a good big lobstah and a salad; and then—er—a small fillet of beef with potatoes fried crisp, and a bottle of my special hock. Ah! and a rum omelette—plenty of rum and sugah. Twig?"

And Caister thought: 'Thank God, I do.'

They had sat down opposite each other at one of two small tables in the little recessed room.

"Luck!" said Bryce-Green.

"Luck!" replied Caister; and the cocktail trickling down him echoed: "Luck!"

"And what do you think of the state of the drama?"

Oh! ho! A question after his own heart. Balancing his monocle by a sweetish smile on the opposite side of his mouth, Caister drawled his answer: "Quite too bally awful!"

"H'm! Yes," said Bryce-Green; "nobody with any genius, is there?"

And Caister thought: 'Nobody with any money.'

"Have you been playing anything great? You were so awfully good in 'Gotta-Grampus'!"

"Nothing particular. I've been—er—rather slack." And with their feel around his waist his trousers seemed to echo: 'Slack!'

"Ah!" said Bryce-Green. "Here we are! Do you like claws?"

"Tha-a-nks. Anything!" To eat—until warned by the pressure of his waist against his trousers! What a feast! And what a flow of his own tongue suddenly released—on drama, music, art; mellow and critical, stimulated by the round eyes and interjections of his little provincial host.

"By Jove, Caister! You've got a *mêche blanche*. Never noticed. I'm awfully interested in *mêches blanches*. Don't think me too frightfully rude—but did it come suddenly?"

"No, gradually."

"And how do you account for it?"

'Try starvation,' trembled on Caister's lips.

"I don't," he said.

"I think it's ripping. Have some more omelette? I often wish I'd gone on the regular stage myself. Must be a topping life, if one has talent, like you."

Topping?

"Have a cigar. Waiter! Coffee, and cigars. I shall come and see you to-night. Suppose you'll be here a week?"

Topping! The laughter and applause—"Mr. Caister's rendering left nothing to be desired; its —— and its —— are in the true spirit of ——!"

Silence recalled him from his rings of smoke.

Bryce-Green was sitting, with cigar held out and mouth a little open, and bright eyes round as pebbles, fixed—fixed on some object near the floor, past the corner of the tablecloth. Had he burnt his mouth? The eyelids fluttered; he looked at Caister, licked his lips like a dog, nervously, and said:

"I say, old chap, don't think me a beast, but are you at all—er—er—rocky? I mean—if I can be of any service, don't hesitate! Old acquaintance, don't you know, and all that——"

His eyes rolled out again towards the object, and Caister followed them. Out there above the carpet he saw it—his own boot. It dangled slightly, six inches off the ground—split—right across, twice, between lace and toecap. Quite! He knew it. A boot left him from the rôle of Bertie Carstairs, in "The Dupe," just before the war. Good boots. His only pair, except the boots of Dr. Dominick, which he was nursing. And from the boot he looked back at Bryce-Green, sleek and concerned. A drop, black when it left his heart, suffused his eye behind the monocle; his smile curled bitterly; he said:

"Not at all, thanks! Why?"

"Oh! n-n-nothing. It just occurred to me." His eyes—but Caister had withdrawn the boot. Bryce-Green paid the bill and rose.

"Old chap, if you'll excuse me; engagement at half-past two. So awf'ly glad to have seen you. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" said Caister. "Thanks."

He was alone. And, chin on hand, he stared through his monocle into an empty coffee cup. Alone with his heart, his boot, his life to come.... 'And what have you been in lately, Mr. Caister?' 'Nothing very much lately. Of course I've played almost everything.' 'Quite so. Perhaps you'll leave your address; can't say anything definite, I'm afraid.' 'I—I should—er—be willing to rehearse on approval; or—if I could read the part?' 'Thank you, afraid we haven't got as far as that.' 'No? Quite! Well, I shall hear from you, perhaps.' And Caister could see his own eyes looking at the manager. God! What a look!... A topping life! A dog's life! Cadging—cadging—cadging for work! A life of draughty waiting, of concealed beggary, of terrible depressions, of want of food!

The waiter came skating round as if he desired to clear. Must go! Two young women had come in and were sitting at the other table between him and the door. He saw them look at him, and his sharpened senses caught the whisper:

"Sure—in the last act. Don't you see his *mêche blanche?*"

"Oh! yes—of course! Isn't it—wasn't he——!"

Caister straightened his back; his smile crept out, he fixed his monocle. They had spotted his Dr. Dominick!

"If you've quite finished, sir, may I clear?"

"Certainly. I'm going." He gathered himself and rose. The young women were gazing up. Elegant, with faint smile, he passed them close, so that they could not see, managing—his broken boot.

1922.

XXXIX

VIRTUE

HAROLD MELLESH, minor clerk in an Accident Assurance Society, having occasion to be present at a certain Police Court to give evidence in the matter of a smashed car, stood riveted by manifestations of the law entirely new to him. His eyes, blue and rather like those of a baby, were opened very widely, his ingenuous forehead wrinkled, his curly hair was moving on his scalp, his fists involuntarily clenching his straw hat. He had seen four ladies of the town dealt with—three "jugged," and one fined, before his sensations reached their climax. Perhaps she was prettier than the others, certainly younger, and she was crying.

"First time you've been here—two pounds, and ten shillings costs."

"But I haven't any money, sir."

"Very well—fourteen days."

Tears streaking the remains of powder—a queer little sound, and the sensations within young Mellesh simmered like a kettle coming to

the boil. He touched a blue sleeve in front of him.

"Here," he said, "I'll pay her fine."

He felt the glance of the policeman running over him like a chilly insect.

"Friend of yours?"

"No."

"I shouldn't, then. She'll be here again within the month."

The girl was passing, he saw the swallowing movement of her throat and said with desperation:

"I don't care. I'll pay it."

The policeman's glance crept about him clammily.

"Come with me, then."

Young Mellesh followed him out.

"Here," said his policeman to the one in charge of the girl, "this gentleman'll pay the fine."

Conscious of a confusion of glances, of his own cheeks reddening furiously, young Mellesh brought out his money—just two pounds fifteen; and, handing over the two pounds ten, he thought: 'My hat! What would Alice say?'

He heard the girl's gasped out: "Ow! Thank you!" his policeman's muttered: "Waste o' money! Still, it was a kind action," and passed out into the street. Now that his feelings had given-off that two pound ten's worth of steam he

felt chilly and dazed, as if virtue had gone out of him. A voice behind him said:

"Thank you ever so much—it *was* kind of you."

Raising his straw hat he stood uncomfortably, to let her pass.

She pushed a card into his hand. "Any time you're passing, I'll be glad to see you; I'm very grateful."

"Not at all!" With a smile, confused like her own, he turned off towards his office.

All day, among his accidents, he felt uncertain. Had he been a fool; had he been a hero? Sometimes he thought: 'What brutes they are to those girls!' and sometimes: 'Don't know; suppose they must do something about it.' And he avoided considering how to explain the absence of two pounds ten shillings on which Alice had been reckoning. His soul was simple like the expressions on his face.

He reached home at the usual hour—six-thirty. His home was grey and small and had a little bit of green up Chalk Farm way, where the Tube made all things possible.

His wife, who had just put their baby daughter to bed, was sitting in the parlour darning his socks. She looked up—surely her forehead was rather like a knee!

"You wear your socks properly, Harold," she said; "it's all I can do to mend this pair." Her eyes were china-blue, round like saucers; her voice had the monotony of one brought up to minimise emotion. A farmer's daughter, young Mellesh had become engaged to her during a holiday in Somerset. Pale himself, from office and the heat, he thought how pale she looked.

"The heat's dreadful, isn't it?" she said. "Sometimes I wish we'd never had baby. It does tie you in the evenings. I *am* looking forward to Whitsuntide, that I am."

Young Mellesh, tall and straggly, bent over and kissed her forehead. How on earth to let her know that he had "blewed" their holiday? He was realising that he had done an awful thing. Perhaps—oh! surely she would understand how he couldn't sit and see that girl "jugged" before his eyes for want of it! But not until the end of their small supper did he say abruptly:

"I got quite upset this morning, Alice. Had to go down to the Police Court about that car smash I told you of, and afterwards I saw them run in a lot of those Piccadilly girls. It fair sickened me to see the way they treat them."

His wife looked up; her face was childlike.

"Why, what do they do to them?"

"Quod them for speakin' to men in the street."

"I s'pose they're up to no good."

Irritated by the matter-of-factness in her voice, he went on:

"They speak to 'em as if they were dirt."

"Well, aren't they?"

"They may be a loose lot, but so are men."

"Men wouldn't be so loose if they weren't there."

"I suppose it's what you call a vicious circle;" and, pleased with his play on words, he added: "One or two of them were pretty."

His wife smiled; her smile had a natural teasing quality.

"They treat *them* better, I suppose?"

That was jolly cynical! and he blurted out:

"One, quite young, never there before, they gave her a fortnight just because she hadn't any money—I couldn't stick it; I paid her fine."

There was sweat on his forehead. His wife's face had gone quite pink.

"You paid? How much?"

He was on the point of saying: "Ten shillings." But something in his soul revolted. "Regular pill —two pound ten;" and he thought glumly: 'Oh! what a fool I've been!'

He did wish Alice wouldn't open her mouth like that, when nothing was coming out—made

her look so silly! Her face puckered suddenly, then became quite blank; he was moved as if he had hit or pinched her.

"Awfully sorry, Alice," he muttered, "Never meant to—she—she cried."

"Course she cried! You fool, Harold!"

He got up, very much disturbed.

"Well, and what would *you* have done?"

"Me? Let her stew in her own juice, of course. It wasn't your affair."

She too had risen. He thrust his fingers through his hair. The girl's face, tear-streaked, confusedly pretty, had come up before him, her soft common grateful voice tickled his ears again. His wife turned her back. So! he was in for a fit of sulks. Well! No doubt he had deserved it.

"I daresay I *was* a fool," he muttered, "but I did think you'd understand how I felt when I saw her cry. Suppose it had been you!" From the toss of her head, he knew he had said something pretty fatal.

"Oh! So that's what you think of me!"

He grasped her shoulder.

"Of course I don't, Alice, don't be so silly!"

She shook off his hand.

"Whose money was it? Now baby and me'll get no holiday. And all because you see a slut crying."

Before he could answer she was gone. He had an awful sense of having outraged justice. Given away her holiday—given his wife's holiday to a girl of the streets! Still, it was his own holiday, too; besides, he earned the money! He'd never wanted to give it to the girl; hadn't got anything for it! Suppose he'd put it into the offertory bag, would Alice have been in such a temper even if it was their holiday? He didn't see much difference. He sat down with knees apart, and elbows planted on them, staring at the peonies on the Brussels carpet paid for on the hire system. And all those feelings that rise in people who live together, when they don't agree, swirled in his curly head, and troubled his eyes, candid like a baby's. If they *would* treat the wretched girls like dirt! If only she hadn't cried! She hadn't meant to cry; he could tell that by the sound of it. And who was the magistrate—he didn't look too like a saint; who was any man to treat her like that? Alice oughtn't— No! But suddenly, he saw Alice again bending over his socks—pale and tired with the heat—doing things for him or baby—and he had given away her holiday! No denying that! Compunction flooded him. He must go up and find her and try and make his peace—he would pawn his bicycle—she should have her holiday—oh! yes!

He opened the door and listened. The little house was ominously quiet—only the outside evening sounds from buses passing in the main road, from children playing on the doorsteps of the side street, from a man with a barrow of bananas. She must be up in the bedroom with baby! He mounted the steep whitewashed stairway. It wanted a carpet, and fresh paint; ah! and a lot of other things Alice wanted—you couldn't have everything at once on four pound ten a week—with the price of living what it was. But she ought to have remembered there were things he wanted too—yes, precious bad, and never thought of getting. The door of their bedroom was locked; he rattled the handle. She opened suddenly, and stood facing him on the little landing.

"I don't want you up here."

"Look here, Alice—this is rotten."

She closed the door behind her.

"It is! You go down again, I don't want you. Think I believe that about crying? I'd be ashamed, if I were you!"

Ashamed! He might have been too soft, but why ashamed?

"Think I don't know what men are like? You can just go to your rotten girl, if she's so pretty!" She stood hard and stiff against the door, with

red spots in her cheeks. She almost made him feel a villain—such conviction in her body.

"Alice! Good Lord! You must be crazy! I've done nothing!"

"But you'd like to. Go along! I don't want you!"

The stabbing stare of her blue eyes, the muffled energy of her voice, the bitterness about her mouth all made a fellow feel—well, that he knew nothing about anything—coming from one's wife like that! He leaned back against the wall.

"Well, I'm damned!" was all he could get out.

"D'you mean to say she didn't ask you?"

The insides of his hands grew wet. The girl's card in his pocket!

"Well, if you like to be a cat I can't help it. What d'you take me for?"

"Giving your own child's money to a dirty slut! You owed it—that's the truth—or will. Go on with you; don't stand there!"

He had a nasty longing to smite her on the mouth—it looked so bitter. "Well," he said slowly, "now I understand."

What was it that he understood? That she was all of a piece with something, with that Police Court, with the tone of the men's voices, with something unsparing, hard and righteous, which came down sharp on people?

"I thought—I think you might——" he stammered.

"Ugh!" The sound exasperated him so, that he turned to go downstairs.

"You whited sepulchre!"

The door clicked before he could answer the odd insult; he heard the key turned. Idiotic! The little landing seemed too small to hold his feelings. Would he ever have said a word to Alice, if he *had* done it? Why! He had never even thought of doing anything!

Giddy from chagrin he ran downstairs, and, clawing his straw hat from the rack, went out. The streets were malodorous from London fog, fried fish, petrol, hot dirty people; he strode along troubled, his eyes very rueful. So this was what he was really married to—this—this! It was like being married to that Police Court! It wasn't human—no, it wasn't—to be so suspicious and virtuous as all that! What was the use of being decent and straight, if this was all you got for it? Someone touched him on the shoulder.

"Mister, you're all white behind; let me brush you."

He stood still confusedly, while a stout fair man smote his back up and down with a large flat hand. Whited sepulchre! A bubble of rage rose to his lips. All right! She should see! He felt

for the girl's card, and was suddenly amazed to find that he had no need to look at it—he remembered the address. Not far off, on the other side of the Euston Road! That was funny—had he been looking at it without realising? They said you had a subconscious mind. Well, what about it? No, it was his conscious mind that was going to serve Alice out! He had reached the Euston Road. Crossing it, he began to feel a queer pleasurable weakness in the legs. By this he knew that he was going to do wrong. He was not going to visit the girl just to serve his wife out, but because the prospect was——! That was bad—bad: it would put Alice in the right! He stood still at the corner of a narrow square, with a strip of garden, and railings round it. He leaned against those railings, his eyes searching the trees. He had always been quite straight with his wife—it was she who had put the idea into his head. And yet his legs being pleasurably weak seemed in an odd way to excuse her. It was like his doubt whether they hadn't to do something about it at the Police Court. Barring Alice—barring the Police Court—where would he—would any man be? Without virtue, entirely without virtue. A pigeon in the garden cooed. "Any time you're passing, I'll be glad to see you." It had sounded genuine—really grateful. And the girl had looked

—not worse than anybody else! If Alice had been sympathetic about it he would never have thought of the girl again; that is—well——! The doubt set his legs in motion. He was a married man, and that was all about it. But he looked across at the numbers on the houses. Twenty-seven! Yes, there it was! A bloom of lilac brushed his face. The scent jerked him suddenly back to the farm in Somerset, and he and Alice courting. Alice—not the Alice on the landing! He scrutinised the shabby house, and suddenly went hot all over. Suppose he went in there—what would that girl think? That he had paid her fine because——! But that wasn't it at all—oh! no—he wasn't a squirt like that! He turned his face away, and walked on fast and far.

The signs were lit above the theatres; traffic was scanty, the streets a long dawdle of what vehicles and humans were about. He came to Leicester Square and sat down on a bench. The lights all round him brightened slowly under the dusk—theatre lights, street lamps. And the pity of things smote him, sitting there. So much of everything; and one got so little of anything! Adding figures up all day, going home to Alice—that was life! Well; it wasn't so bad when Alice was nice to him. But—Crikey!—what one missed! That book about the South Sea Islands

—places, peoples, sights, sounds, scents, all over the world! Four pound ten a week, a wife, a baby! Well, you couldn't have things both ways —but had he got them either way? Not with the Alice on the landing!

Ah! Well! Poor Alice; jolly hard on her to miss her holiday! But she might have given him the chance to tell her that he would pawn his bicycle. Or was it all a bad dream? Had he ever really been in that Police Court, seen them herding those girls to prison—girls who did what they did because—well, like himself, they had missed too much. They'd catch a fresh lot to-night. What a fool he'd been to pay that fine!

'Glad I didn't go into that girl's house, anyway,' he thought. 'I would have felt a scum!' The only decent thing about it all had been her look when she said: "Ow! thank you!" That gave him a little feeling of warmth even now; and then—it, too, chilled away. Nothing for it! When he had done sitting there, he must go home! If Alice had thought him a wrong-un before, what would she think when he returned? Well, there it was! The milk was spilt! But he did wish she hadn't got such a virtue on her.

The sky deepened and darkened, the lights stared white; the Square Garden with its flowerbeds seemed all cut out and stiff, like scenery on

a stage. Must go back and "stick" it! No good to worry!

He got up from the bench, and gave himself a shake. His eyes, turned towards the lights of the Alhambra, were round, candid, decent, like the eyes of a baby.

1922.

XL

CONSCIENCE

TAGGART sat up. The scoop under the ranger's fence, cannily selected for his sleeping place, was overhung by branches, and the birds of Hyde Park were at matins already. His watch had gone the way of his other belongings during the last three months, and he could only assume from the meagre light that it was but little after dawn. He was not grateful to the birds; he would be hungry long before a breakfast coming from he hardly knew where. But he listened to them with interest. This was the first night he had passed in the open, and, like all amateurs, he felt a kind of triumph at having achieved vagrancy in spite of the law, the ranger, and the dew. He was a Northumbrian too, and his "tail still up," as he expressed it. Born in a town, Taggart had not much country lore—at sparrows, blackbirds, thrushes, his knowledge stopped; but he enjoyed the bobbery the little beggars were kicking up, and, though a trifle stiff perhaps, he felt "fine."

He lit his pipe, and almost at once his brain began to revolve the daily problem of how to get a job, and of why he had lost the one he had.

Walking, three months ago, burly, upright, secure and jolly, into the room of his chief at the offices of "Conglomerated Journals Ltd.," he had been greeted with:

"Morning, Taggart. Georgie Grebe is to give us an article for *The Lighthouse*. He won't have time to write it, of course. I want you just to do us a column he could sign—something Grebeish. I'm anxious for a feature of that sort every week now in *The Lighthouse;* got half a dozen really good names. We must get it on its legs with the big Public."

Taggart smiled. Georgie Grebe! The name was a household word—tophole idea to get him!

"Did he ever write a line in his life, Sir?"

"Don't suppose so—but you know the sort of thing he *would* write; he gets nothing for it but the Ad. The week after I've got Sir Cutman Kane —you'll want to be a bit careful there; but you can get his manner from that book of his on murder trials. He hasn't got a minute—must have it devilled; but he'll sign anything decently done. I'm going to *make* 'em buy *The Lighthouse*, Taggart. Get on to the Grebe article at once, will you."

Taggart nodded, and drawing from his pocket some type-written sheets of paper, laid them on the bureau.

"Here's your signed leader, Sir; I've gingered it a bit too much, perhaps."

"Haven't time to look at it; got to catch the boat train, Taggart."

"Shall I tone it down a little?"

"Better perhaps; use your judgment. Sit here, and do it right now. Good-bye; back on Friday."

Reaching for his soft hat, assisted into his coat by Taggart, the chief was gone.

Taggart sat down to pencil the signed leader.

'Good leader,' he thought, 'pity nobody knows I write 'em!'

This devilling was quite an art, and, not unlike art, poorly enough paid—still, not bad fun feeling you were the pea and the chief only the shell—the chief, with his great name and controlling influence. He finished pencilling; O.K'd the sheets; thought: 'Georgie Grebe! What the deuce shall I write about?' and went back to his room.

It was not much of a room, and there was not much in it except Jimmy Counter, smoking a pipe and writing furiously.

Taggart sat down too, lit his own pipe, took a sheet of paper and scrawled the words: "Georgie Grebe Article" across the top.

Georgie Grebe! It *was* a scoop! The chief had a wonderful flair for just the names that got the Public. There was something rather beautifully simple about writing an article for a man who had never written a line—something virginal in the conception. And when you came to think of it, something virginal in the Public's buying of the article to read the thoughts of their idol, Georgie Grebe. Yes, and what were the thoughts of their idol, Georgie Grebe? If he, Taggart, didn't know, nobody would, not even Georgie Grebe! Taggart smiled, then felt a little nervous. Georgie Grebe—celebrated clown—probably he hadn't any thoughts! Really, there was something very trustful about the Public! He dipped his pen in ink and sat staring at the nib. Trustful! The word had disturbed the transparency of his mental process, as a crystal of peroxide will disturb and colour a basinful of water. Trustful! The Public would pay their pennies to read what they thought were the thoughts of Georgie Grebe. But Georgie Grebe had no thoughts! Taggart bit into the pipe stem. Steady! He was getting on too fast. Of course Georgie Grebe had thoughts if he signed! By writing his name he adopted them —didn't he? His name would be reproduced in autograph, with the indispensable portrait. People would see by his features that Georgie Grebe

must have had those thoughts. Trustful! Was the Public so very trustful—when there was such evidence? Besides, Grebe would read his thoughts—fraudulent! Bosh! This was just devilling, there was nothing fraudulent about "devilling"—everybody did it. Fraudulent! You might as well say those signed leaders written for the chief were fraudulent. Of course they weren't—they were only devilled. The Public paid for the thoughts of the chief, and they were the thoughts of the chief, since he signed them. Devilled thoughts! And yet! Would the Public pay if those leaders were signed A. P. Taggart? The thoughts would be the same—very good thoughts. They ought to pay—but—would they? He struck another match, and wrote:

"I am no writer ladies and gentlemen. I am—believe me—a simple clown. In balancing this new pole upon my nose I am conscious of a certain sense of fraud——"

He crossed out the paragraph. That word again—must keep it from buzzing senselessly round his brain like this! He was only devilling; hold on to the word devilling; it was his living to devil—more or less—just earning his living—getting nothing out of it! Neither was Georgie Grebe—only the Ad! Then who was getting something out of it? "Conglomerated Journals"! out of

Georgie Grebe's name; out of the chief's name below the devilled leaders—a pretty penny! But was there any harm in making the most of a big name? Taggart frowned. Suppose a man went into a shop and bought a box of pills, marked "Holloway," made-up from a recipe of "Tompkins"—did it matter that the man thought they were Holloway's, if they were just as good pills, perhaps better? Taggart laid down his pen and took his pipe out of his mouth. 'Gosh!' he thought: 'Never looked at it this way before! I believe it does matter. A man ought to get the exact article he pays for. If not, any fraud is possible. New Zealand mutton can be sold as English. Jaeger stuffs can have cotton in them. This Grebe article's a fraud.' He relit his pipe. With the first puff his English hatred of a moral attitude, or "swank" of any sort beset him. Who was he to take stand against a custom? Didn't secretaries write the speeches of Parliamentary "bigbugs"? Weren't the opinions of eminent lawyers often written by their juniors, read over and signed? Weren't briefs and pleadings devilled? Yes; but all that was different. In such cases the Public weren't paying for expression, they were paying for knowledge; the big lawyer put his imprimatur on the knowledge, not on the expression of it; the Cabinet Minister endorsed his

views, whether he had written them out or not, and it was his views the Public paid for, not the expression of them. But in this Grebe article the Public would not be paying for any knowledge it contained, nor for any serious views; it would pay for a peep into the mind of their idol. 'And his mind will be mine!' thought Taggart; 'but who'd spend his money to peep into my mind, if he *knew* it was my mind?' He got up, and sat down again.

With a Public so gullible—what did it matter? They lapped up anything and asked for more. Yes! But weren't the gullible the very people who oughtn't to be gulled? He rose again, and toured the dishevelled room. The man at the other table raised his head.

"You seem a bit on your toes."

Taggart stared down at him.

"I've got to write some drivel in *The Lighthouse* for Georgie Grebe to sign. It's just struck me that it's a fraud on the Public. What do you say, Jimmy?"

"In a way. What about it?"

"If it is, I don't want to do it—that's all."

His colleague whistled.

"My dear chap, here am I writing a racing article 'From the Man in the Paddock'—I haven't been on a race course for years."

"Oh! well—that's venial."

"All's venial in our game. Shut your eyes, and swallow. You're only devilling."

"Ga!" said Taggart. "Give a thing a decent label, and it is decent."

"I say, old man, what did you have for breakfast?"

"Look here, Jimmy, I'm inclined to think I've struck a snag. It never occurred to me before."

"Well, don't let it occur to you again. Think of old Dumas, I've heard he put his name to sixty volumes in one year. Has that done him any harm?"

Taggart rumpled his hair, reddish and rather stiff.

"Damn!" he said.

Counter laughed.

"You get a fixed screw for doing what you're told. Why worry? Papers must be sold. Georgie Grebe—that's some stunt."

"Blast Georgie Grebe!"

He took his hat and went out; a prolonged whistle followed him. All next day he spent doing other jobs, trying to persuade himself that he was a crank, and gingerly feeling the mouths of journalists. All he got was: Fuss about nothing! What was the matter with devilling? With life at such pressure, what else could you have? But for the life of him he could not persuade himself to go on

with the thoughts of Georgie Grebe. He remembered suddenly that his father had changed the dogmas of his religion at forty-five, and thereby lost a cure of souls. He was very unhappy; it was like discovering that he had inherited tuberculosis. On Friday he was sent for by the chief.

"Morning, Taggart; I'm just back. Look here, this leader for to-morrow—it's nothing but a string of statements. Where's my style?"

Taggart shifted his considerable weight from foot to foot.

"Well, Sir," he said, "I thought perhaps you'd like to put that in yourself, for a change. The facts are all right."

The chief stared.

"My good fellow, do you suppose I've got time for that? Anybody could have written this; I can't sign it as it stands. Tone it up."

Taggart took the article from the chief's hand.

"I don't know that I can," he said; "I'm——" and stopped.

The chief said kindly:

"Are you ill?"

Taggart disclaimed.

"Private trouble?"

"No."

"Well, get on with it, then. How's the Grebe article turned out?"

"It hasn't."

"How d'you mean?"

Taggart felt his body stiffening.

"Fact is I can't write it."

"Good gracious, man, any drivel will do, so long as it's got a flavour of some sort to carry the name."

Taggart swallowed.

"That's it. Is it quite playing the game with the Public, Sir?"

The chief seemed to loom larger suddenly.

"I don't follow you, Taggart."

Taggart blurted out: "I don't want to write anyone else's stuff in future, unless it's just news or facts."

The chief's face grew very red.

"I pay you to do certain work. If you don't care to carry out instructions, we can dispense with your services. What's the matter with you, Taggart?"

Taggart replied with a wry smile:

"Suffering from a fit of conscience, Sir. Isn't it a matter of commercial honesty?"

The chief sat back in his swivel chair and gazed at him for quite twenty seconds.

"Well," he said at last in an icy voice, "I have never been so insulted. Good morning! You are at liberty."

Taggart laid down the sheets of paper, walked stiffly to the door, and turned.

"Awfully sorry, Sir, can't help it."

The chief bowed distantly, and Taggart went out.

For three months he had enjoyed liberty. Journalism was overstocked; his name not well known. Too shy and proud to ask for recommendation from "Conglomerated Journals," he could never bring himself to explain why he had "got the hoof." Claim a higher standard of morality than his fellows—not he. For two months he had carried on pretty well, but the last few weeks had brought him low indeed. Yet the more he brooded, the more he felt he had been right, and the less inclined he was to speak of it. Loyalty to the chief he had insulted by taking such an attitude, dislike of being thought a fool, beyond all, dread of "swanking" kept him silent. When asked why he had left "Conglomerated Journals" he returned the answer always: "Disagreement on a point of principle," and refused to enter into details. But a feeling had got about that he was a bit of a crank; for though no one at "Conglomerated Journals" knew exactly why he had vanished, Counter had spread the news that he had blasted Georgie Grebe, and refused to write his article. Someone else had done it. Taggart read

the production with irritation. It was jolly bad. Inefficient devilling still hurt one who had devilled long and efficiently without a qualm. When the article which had not been written by Sir Cutman Kane appeared—he swore aloud. It was no more like the one Sir Cutman would have signed if Taggart had written it, than the boots of Taggart were like the boots of the chief, who seemed to wear a fresh pair every day, with cloth tops. He read the chief's new leaders with melancholy, spotting the many deficiencies of style supplied to the chief by—whoever it was now wrote them. His square red cheerful face had a bitter look while he was reading; and when he had finished, he would rumple his stiff hair. But he was sturdy, and never got so far as calling himself a fool for his pains, though week by week he felt more certain that his protest had been vain.

Sitting against the ranger's paling, listening to the birds, he had a dreamy feeling about it all. Queer creatures, human beings! So damned uncritical! Had he not been like that himself for years and years? The power of a label—that was what struck him, sitting there. Label a thing decently, and it *was* decent! Ah! but, "Rue by any other name would smell as sour!" Conscience!—it was the devil!

1922.

XLI

SALTA PRO NOBIS

(A VARIATION)

THE dancer, my Mother, is very sad. She sits with her head on her hands. She looks into the emptiness. It is frightful to watch. I have tried to make her pray, my Mother, but the poor girl—she does not know how; she has no belief. She refuses even to confess herself. She is pagan—but quite pagan. What could one do for her, my Mother—to cheer her a little during these hours? I have tried to make her tell me of her life. She does not answer. She sits and looks always into the emptiness. It does me harm in the heart to see her. Is there nothing one can do to comfort her a little before she dies? To die so young—so full of life; for her who has no faith! To be shot—so young, so beautiful; but it is frightful, my Mother!"

When she had finished speaking thus, the little elderly Sister raised her hands, and crossed them quietly on her grey-clothed breast. Her eyes,

brown and mild, looked up, questioning the face before her, wax pale under its coif and smooth grey hair. Straight, thin, as it were bodiless, beneath the grey and white of her garb, the Mother Superior stood pondering. The spy-woman in her charge, a dancer with gypsy blood they said—or was it Moorish?—who had wormed secrets from her French naval lover, and sold them to the Germans in Spain. At the trial they said there was no doubt. And they had brought her to the Convent saying, "Keep her for us till the fifteenth. She will be better with you than in prison." To be shot—a woman! It made one shiver! And yet—it was war! It was for France!

Looking down at the little Sister with the soft brown eyes, the Mother Superior answered:

"One must see, my daughter. Take me to her cell."

Along the corridor they passed, and went in gently. The dancer was sitting on her bed, with legs crossed under her. There was no colour in her skin, save the saffron sprinkled into it by eastern blood. The face was oval, the eyebrows slanted a little up; black hair formed on her forehead a V. reversed; her lips, sensuous but fine, showed a gleam of teeth. Her arms were crossed, as though compressing the fire within her supple body. Her eyes, colour of Malaga wine, looked through and

beyond the whitened walls, through and beyond her visitors, like the eyes of a caged leopard.

The Mother Superior spoke:

"What can we do for you, my daughter?"

The daughter shrugged her body from the waist; one could see its supple shivering beneath her silk garment.

"You suffer, my daughter. They tell me you do not pray. It is a pity."

The dancer smiled—that quickly passing smile had sweetness, as of something tasted, of a rich tune, of a long kiss; she shook her head.

"One would not say anything to trouble you, my daughter; one feels pity for your suffering. One comprehends. Is there a book you would read; some wine you would like; in a word, anything which could distract you a little?"

The dancer untwined her arms, and clasped them behind her neck. The movement was beautiful, sinuous—all her body beautiful; and, into the Mother Superior's waxen cheeks a faint colour came.

"Will you dance for us, my daughter?"

Again the smile, like the taste of a sweet wine, came on the dancer's face, and this time did not pass.

"Yes," she said, "I will dance for you—willingly. It will give me pleasure, Madame!"

"That is good. Your dresses shall be brought. This evening in the refectory, after the meal. If you wish music—one can place a piano. Sister Mathilde is a good musician."

"Yes, music—some simple dances. Madame, could I smoke?"

"Certainly, my daughter. I will have cigarettes brought to you."

The dancer stretched out her hand. Between her own fragile with thin blue veins, the Mother Superior felt its supple warmth, and shivered. To-morrow it would be cold and stiff!

"*Au revoir!* then, my daughter. . . ."

"The dancer will dance for us!" This was the word. One waited, expectant, as for a marvel. One placed the piano; procured music; sat eating the evening meal—whispering. The strangeness of it! The intrusion! The little gay ghosts of memories! Ah! the dramatic, the strange event! Soon the meal was finished; the tables cleared, removed; against the wall, on the long benches sixty grey figures with white coifs waited—in the centre the Mother Superior, at the piano Sister Mathilde.

The little elderly Sister came first; then, down the long whitened refectory, the dancer walking slowly over the dark oak floor. Every head was turned—alone the Mother Superior sat motion-

less, thinking: 'If only it does not put notions into some light heads!'

The dancer wore a full skirt of black silk, she had silvery shoes and stockings, round her waist was a broad tight network of gold, over her bust tight silvery tissue, with black lace draped; her arms were bare; a red flower was set to one side of her black hair; she held a black and ivory fan. Her lips were just touched with red, her eyes just touched with black; her face was like a mask. She stood in the very centre, with eyes cast down. Sister Mathilde began to play. The dancer lifted her fan. In that dance of Spain she hardly moved from where she stood, swaying, shivering, spinning, poised; only the eyes of her face seemed alive, resting on this face and on that of the long row of faces, where so many feelings were expressed—curiosity and doubt, pleasure, timidity, horror, curiosity. Sister Mathilde ceased playing, the dancer stood still; a little murmur broke along the line of nuns, and the dancer smiled. Then Sister Mathilde began again to play, a Polish dance; for a moment the dancer listened as if to catch the rhythm of music strange to her; then her feet moved, her lips parted, she was sweet and gay, like a butterfly, without a care; and on the lips of the watching faces smiles came, and little murmurs of pleasure escaped.

The Mother Superior sat without moving, her thin lips pressed together, her thin fingers interlaced. Images from the past kept starting out, and falling back, like figures from some curious old musical box. That long-ago time—she was remembering—when her lover was killed in the Franco-Prussian war, and she entered religion. This supple figure from the heathen world, the red flower in the black hair, the whitened face, the sweetened eyes, stirred up remembrance, sweet and yearning, of her own gay pulses, before they had seemed to die, and she brought them to the Church to bury them.

The music ceased; began again a Habañera, reviving memories of the pulses after they were buried—secret, throbbing, dark. The Mother Superior turned her face to left and right. Had she been wise? So many light heads, so many young hearts! And yet why not soothe the last dark hours of this poor heathen girl? She was happy, dancing. Yes, she was happy! What power! And what abandonment! It was frightening. She was holding every eye—the eyes even of Sister Louise—holding them as a snake holds a rabbit's eyes. The Mother Superior nearly smiled. That poor Sister Louise! And then, just beyond that face of fascinated horror, the Mother Superior saw young Sister Marie. How the child was staring—what eyes, what lips! Sister Marie

—so young—just twenty—her lover dead in the war—but one year dead! Sister Marie—prettiest in all the Convent! Her hands—how tightly they seemed pressed together on her lap! And—but yes—it was at Sister Marie that the dancer looked; at Sister Marie she twirled and writhed those supple fiery limbs! For Sister Marie the strange sweet smile came and went on those enticing reddened lips. In dance after dance—like a bee on a favourite flower—to Sister Marie the dancer seemed to cling. And the Mother Superior thought: 'Is this the Blessed Virgin's work I have done, or—the Devil's?'

Close along the line of nuns the dancer was sweeping now; her eyes glowed, her face was proud, her body supreme. Sister Marie! What was it? A look, a touch with the fan! The music ceased. The dancer blew a kiss. It lighted—where? "*Gracias, Señoras! Adios!*"

Slowly, swaying, as she had come, she walked away over the dark floor; and the little old Sister followed.

A sighing sound from the long row of nuns; and —yes—one sob!

"Go to your rooms, my daughters! Sister Marie!"

The young nun came forward; tears were in her eyes.

"Sister Marie, pray that the sins of that poor

soul be forgiven. But yes, my child, it is sad. Go to your room. Pray!"

With what grace the child walked! She, too, had the limbs of beauty. The Mother Superior sighed. . . .

Morning, cold, grey, a sprinkle of snow on the ground; they came for the dancer during Mass. A sound of firing! With trembling lips, the Mother Superior prayed for the soul dancing before her God. . . .

That evening they searched for Sister Marie, but could not find her. After two days a letter came:

"Forgive me, my Mother. I have gone back to life.

MARIE."

The Mother Superior sat quite still. Life in death! Figures starting out from that old musical box of memory; the dancer's face, red flower in the hair, dark sweetened eyes, lips, touched with flying finger, parted in a kiss!

1922.

XLII

A LONG-AGO AFFAIR

HUBERT MARSLAND, the landscape painter, returning from a day's sketching on the river in the summer of 1921, had occasion to stay the progress of his two-seater about ten miles from London for a minor repair, and while his car was being seen to, strolled away from the garage to have a look at a house where he had often spent his holidays as a boy. Walking through a gateway and passing a large gravel-pit on his left, he was soon opposite the house, which stood back a little in its grounds. Very much changed! More pretentious, not so homely as when his Uncle and Aunt lived there, and he used to play cricket on this warren opposite, where the cricket ground, it seemed, had been turned into a golf course. It was late—the dinner-hour, nobody playing, and passing on to the links he stood digesting the geography. Here must have been where the old pavilion was. And there—still turfed—where he had made that

particularly nice stroke to leg, when he went in last and carried his bat for thirteen. Thirty-nine years ago—his sixteenth birthday. How vividly he remembered his new pads! A. P. Lucas had played against them and only made thirty-two—one founded one's style on A. P. Lucas in those days—feet in front of the bat, and pointed a little forward, elegant; you never saw it now, and a good thing too—one could sacrifice too much to style! Still, the tendency was all the other way; style was too much "off," perhaps!

He stepped back into the sun and sat down on the grass. Peaceful—very still! The haze of the distant downs was visible between his Uncle's old house and the next; and there was the clump of elms on the far side behind which the sun would be going down just as it used to then. He pressed the palms of his hands to the turf. A glorious summer—something like that summer of long ago. And warmth from the turf, or perhaps from the past, crept into his heart, and made it ache a little. Just here he must have sat, after his innings, at Mrs. Monteith's feet peeping out of a flounced dress. Lord! The fools boys were! How headlong and uncalculating their devotions! A softness in voice and eyes, a smile, a touch or two—and they were slaves! Young fools, but

good young fools. And, standing behind her chair—he could see him now—that other idol Captain MacKay, with his face of browned ivory—just the colour of that elephant's tusk his Uncle had, which had gone so yellow—and his perfect black moustache, his white tie, check suit, carnation, spats, Malacca cane—all so fascinating! Mrs. Monteith, "the grass widow" they had called her! He remembered the look in people's eyes, the tone in their voices. Such a pretty woman! He had "fallen for her" at first sight, as the Yanks put it—her special scent, her daintiness, her voice! And that day on the river, when she made much of him, and Captain MacKay attended Evelyn Curtiss so assiduously that he was expected to propose. Quaint period! They used the word courting then, wore full skirts, high stays; and himself a blue elastic belt round his white-flannelled waist. And in the evening afterwards, his Aunt had said with an arch smile: "Goodnight, *silly* boy!" Silly boy indeed, with a flower the grass widow had dropped pressed by his cheek into his pillow! What folly! And that next Sunday—looking forward to Church—passionately brushing his top hat; all through the service spying at her creamy profile, two pews in front on the left, between goat-bearded old Hallgrave her Uncle, and her pink, broad, white-

haired Aunt; scheming to get near her when she came out, lingering, lurking, getting just a smile and the rustle of her flounces. Ah, ha! A little went a long way then! And the last day of his holidays and its night with the first introduction to reality. Who said the Victorian Age was innocent?

Marsland put his palm up to his cheek. No! the dew was not yet falling! And his mind lightly turned and tossed his memories of women, as a man turns and tosses hay to air it; but nothing remembered gave him quite the feeling of that first experience.

His Aunt's dance! His first white waistcoat, bought *ad hoc*, from the local tailor, his tie laboriously imitating the hero—Captain MacKay's. All came back with such freshness in the quiet of the warren—the expectancy, the humble shy excitement, the breathless asking for a dance, the writing "Mrs. Monteith" twice on his little gilt-edged programme with its tiny tasselled white pencil; her slow-moving fan, her smile. And the first dance when it came; what infinite care not to tread on her white satin toes; what a thrill when her arm pressed his in the crush—such holy rapture, about all the first part of that evening, with yet another dance to come! If only he could have twirled her and "reversed" like

his pattern, Captain MacKay! Then delirium growing as the second dance came near, making him cut his partner—the cool grass-scented air out on the dark terrace, with the chafers booming by, and in the starshine the poplars wondrously tall; the careful adjustment of his tie and waistcoat, the careful polishing of his hot face! A long breath then, and into the house to find her! Ball-room, supper-room, stairs, library, billiard-room, all drawn blank—"Estudiantina" going on and on, and he a wandering, white-waistcoated young ghost. Ah! The conservatory—and the hurrying there! And then the moment which had always been, was even now, such a blurred confused impression. Smothered voices from between a clump of flowers: "I saw her." "Who was the man?" A glimpse, gone past in a flash, of an ivory face, a black moustache! And then her voice: "Hubert"; and her hot hand clasping his, drawing him to her; her scent, her face smiling, very set! A rustling behind the flowers, those people spying; and suddenly her lips on his cheek, the kiss sounding in his ears, her voice saying, very softly: "Hubert, dear boy!" The rustle receded, ceased. What a long silent minute, then, among the ferns and blossoms in the dusk with her face close to his, pale, perturbed, before she led him out into the light, while he was slowly

realising that she had made use of him to shelter her. A boy—not old enough to be her lover, but old enough to save her name and that of Captain MacKay! Her kiss—the last of many—but not upon *his* lips, *his* cheeks! Hard work realising that! A boy—of no account—a boy, who in a day would be at school again, kissed that *he* and *she* might renew their intrigue unsuspected!

How had he behaved the rest of that evening of romance bedrabbled? He hardly knew. Betrayed with a kiss! Two idols in the dust! And did they care what he was feeling? Not they! All they cared for was to cover up their tracks with him! But somehow—somehow—he had never shown her that he knew. Only, when their dance was over, and someone came and took her for the next, he escaped up to his little room, tore off his gloves, his waistcoat; lay on his bed, thought bitter thoughts. A boy! There he had stayed, with the thrum of the music in his ears, till at last it died away for good and the carriages were gone, and the night was quiet.

Squatting on the warren grass, still warm and dewless, Marsland rubbed his knees. Nothing like boys for generosity! And, with a little smile, he thought of his Aunt next morning, half-arch and half-concerned: "It isn't nice, dear, to sit out in dark corners, and—well, perhaps, it wasn't

your fault, but still, it isn't nice—not—quite ——" and of how suddenly she had stopped, looking in his face, where his lips were curling in his first ironic laugh. She had never forgiven him that laugh—thinking him a cynical young Lothario? And Marsland thought: 'Live and learn! Wonder what became of those two? Victorian Age! Hatches were battened down in those days! But, innocent—my hat!'

Ah! The sun was off, dew falling! He got up, rubbing his knees to take the stiffness out of them. Pigeons in the wood beyond were calling. A window in his Uncle's old home blazed like a jewel in the sun's last rays between the poplar trees. Heh! dear— A little long-ago affair!

1922.

XLIII

ACME

IN these days no man of genius need starve. The following story of my friend, Bruce, may be taken as proof of this assertion. Nearly sixty when I first knew him, he must have written already some fifteen books, which had earned him the reputation of "a genius" with the few who know. He used to live in York Street, Adelphi, where he had two rooms up the very shaky staircase of a house chiefly remarkable for the fact that its front door seemed always open. I suppose there never was a writer more indifferent to what people thought of him. He profoundly neglected the Press—not with one of those neglects which grow on writers from reading reviews of their own works—he seemed never to read criticism, but with the basic neglect of "an original," a nomadic spirit, a stranger in modern civilisation, who would leave his attics for long months of wandering, and come back there to hibernate and write a book. He was a tall, thin man, with a face rather like

Mark Twain's, black eyebrows which bristled and shot up, a bitten drooping grey moustache, and fuzzy grey hair; but his eyes were like owl's eyes, piercing, melancholy, dark brown, and gave to his rugged face an extraordinary expression of a spirit remote from the flesh which had captured it. He was a bachelor, who seemed to avoid women; perhaps they had "learned" him that; for he must have been very attractive to them.

The year of which I write had been to my friend Bruce the devil, monetarily speaking. With his passion for writing that for which his Age had no taste—what could he expect? His last book had been a complete frost. He had undergone, too, an operation which had cost him much money and left him very weak. When I went to see him that October, I found him stretched out on two chairs, smoking the Brazilian cigarettes which he affected—and which always affected me, so black and strong they were, in their yellow maize-leaf coverings. He had a writing-pad on his knee, and sheets of paper scattered all around. The room had a very meagre look. I had not seen him for a year and more, but he looked up at me as if I'd been in yesterday.

"Hallo!" he said: "I went into a thing they call a Cinema last night. Have you ever been?"

"Ever been? Do you know how long the Cinema has been going? Since about 1900."

"Well! What a *thing!* I'm writing a skit on it!"

"How—a skit?"

"Parody—wildest yarn you ever read."

He took up a sheet of paper and began chuckling to himself.

"My heroine," he said, "is an Octoroon. Her eyes swim, and her lovely bosom heaves. Everybody wants her, and she's more virtuous than words can say. The situations she doesn't succumb to would freeze your blood; they'd roast your marrow. She has a perfect devil of a brother, with whom she was brought up, and who knows her deep dark secret and wants to trade her off to a millionaire who also has a deep dark secret. Altogether there are four deep dark secrets in my yarn. It's a corker."

"What a waste of your time!" I said.

"My time!" he answered fiercely: "What's the use of my time? Nobody buys my books."

"Who's attending you?"

"Doctors! They take your money, that's all. I've got no money. Don't talk about me!" Again he took up a sheet of manuscript; and chuckled.

"Last night—at that place—they had—Good

God!—a race between a train and a motor car. Well, I've got one between a train, a motor car, a flying machine, and a horse."

I sat up.

"May I have a look at your skit," I said, "when you've finished it?"

"It *is* finished. Wrote it straight off. D'you think I could stop and then go on again with a thing like that?" He gathered the sheets and held them out to me. "Take the thing—it's amused me to do it. The heroine's secret is that she isn't an Octoroon at all; she's a De La Casse —purest Creole blood of the South; and her villainous brother isn't her brother; and the bad millionaire isn't a millionaire; and her penniless lover is. It's rich, I tell you!"

"Thanks," I said drily, and took the sheets.

I went away concerned about my friend, his illness and his poverty, especially his poverty, for I saw no end to it.

After dinner that evening I began languidly to read his skit. I had not read two pages of the thirty-five before I started up, sat down again, and feverishly read on. Skit! By George! He had written a perfect scenario—or, rather, that which wanted the merest professional touching-up to be perfect. I was excited. It was a little gold-mine if properly handled. Any good film

company, I felt convinced, would catch at it. Yes! But how to handle it? Bruce was such an unaccountable creature, such a wild old bird! Imagine his having only just realised the Cinema! If I told him his skit was a serious film, he would say: "Good God!" and put it in the fire, priceless though it was. And yet, how could I market it without *carte blanche*, and how get *carte blanche* without giving my discovery away? I was deathly keen on getting some money for him; and this thing, properly worked, might almost make him independent. I felt as if I had a priceless Museum piece which a single stumble might shatter to fragments. The tone of his voice when he spoke of the Cinema—"What a *thing!*" kept coming back to me. He was prickly proud, too—very difficult about money. Could I work it without telling him anything? I knew he never looked at a newspaper. But should I be justified in taking advantage of that—in getting the thing accepted and produced without his knowing? I revolved the question for hours, and went to see him again next day.

He was reading.

"Hallo! You again? What do you think of this theory—that the Egyptians derive from a Saharan civilisation?"

"I don't think," I said.

"It's nonsense. This fellow——"

I interrupted him.

"Do you want that skit back, or can I keep it?"

"Skit? What skit?"

"The thing you gave me yesterday."

"That! Light your fire with it. This fellow——"

"Yes," I said; "I'll light a fire with it. I see you're busy."

"Oh, no! I'm not," he said, "I've nothing to do. What's the good of my writing? I earn less and less with every book that comes out. I'm dying of poverty."

"That's because you won't consider the public."

"*How* can I consider the public, when I don't know what they want?"

"Because you won't take the trouble to find out. If I suggested a way to you of pleasing the public and making money, you'd kick me out of the room."

And the words: "For instance, I've got a little gold-mine of yours in my pocket," were on the tip of my tongue, but I choked them back. 'Daren't risk it!' I thought. 'He's given you the thing. *Carte blanche—cartes serrés!*'

I took the gold-mine away and promptly

rough-shaped it for the film. It was perfectly easy, without any alteration of the story. Then I was faced with the temptation to put his name to it. The point was this: If I took it to a film company as an authorless scenario, I should only get authorless terms; whereas, if I put his name to it, with a little talking I could double the terms at least. The film public didn't know his name, of course, but the inner literary public did, and it's wonderful how you can impress the market with the word "genius" judiciously used. It was too dangerous, however; and at last I hit on a middle course. I would take it to them with no name attached, but tell them it was by "a genius," and suggest that they could make capital out of the incognito. I knew they would feel it *was* by a genius.

I took it to an excellent company next day, with a covering note saying: "The author, a man of recognised literary genius, for certain reasons prefers to remain unknown." They took a fortnight in which to rise, but they rose. They had to. The thing was too good in itself. For a week I played them over terms. Twice I delivered an ultimatum—twice they surrendered: they knew too well what they had got. I could have made a contract with £2,000 down which would have brought at least another £2,000 before the con-

tract term closed; but I compounded for one that gave me £3,000 down, as likely to lead to less difficulty with Bruce. The terms were not a whit too good for what was really the "acme" of scenarios. If I could have been quite open, I could certainly have done better. Finally, however, I signed the contract, delivered the manuscript, and received a cheque for the price. I was elated, and at the same time knew that my troubles were just beginning. With Bruce's feeling about the film, how the deuce should I get him to take the money? Could I go to his publishers, and conspire with them to trickle it out to him gradually, as if it came from his books? That meant letting them into the secret; besides, he was too used to receiving practically nothing from his books; it would lead him to make enquiry, and the secret was bound to come out. Could I get a lawyer to spring an inheritance on him? That would mean no end of lying and elaboration, even if a lawyer would consent. Should I send him the money in Bank of England notes, with the words: "From a lifelong admirer of your genius"? I was afraid he would suspect a trick, or stolen notes, and go to the police to trace them. Or should I just go, put the cheque on the table, and tell him the truth?

The question worried me terribly, for I didn't

feel entitled to consult others who knew him. It was the sort of thing that, if talked over, would certainly leak out. It was not desirable, however, to delay cashing a big cheque like that. Besides, they had started on the production. It happened to be a slack time, with a dearth of good films, so that they were rushing it on. And in the meantime there was Bruce—starved of everything he wanted, unable to get away for want of money, depressed about his health and his future. And yet so completely had he always seemed to me different, strange, superior to this civilisation of ours, that the idea of going to him and saying simply: "This is yours, for the film you wrote," scared me. I could hear his: "I? Write for the Cinema? What do you mean?"

When I came to think of it, I had surely taken an extravagant liberty in marketing the thing without consulting him. I felt he would never forgive that, and my feeling towards him was so affectionate, even reverential, that I simply hated the idea of being cast out of his affections. At last I hit on a way that by introducing my own interest might break my fall. I cashed the cheque, lodged the money at my bank, drew my own cheque on it for the full amount, and armed with that and the contract, went to see him.

He was lying on two chairs, smoking his Bra-

zilians, and playing with a stray cat which had attached itself to him. He seemed rather less prickly than usual, and after beating about the bushes of his health and other matters, I began:

"I've got a confession to make, Bruce."

"Confession!" he said, "What confession?"

"You remember that skit on the film you wrote, and gave me, about six weeks ago?"

"No."

"Yes, you do—about an Octoroon."

He chuckled. "Oh! Ah! That!"

I took a deep breath, and went on:

"Well, I sold it; and the price of course belongs to you."

"What? Who'd print a thing like that?"

"It isn't printed. It's been made into a film—Super-film, they call it."

His hand came to a pause on the cat's back, and he glared at me. I hastened on:

"I ought to have told you what I was doing, but you're so prickly, and you've got such confounded superior notions. I thought if I did, you'd be biting off your nose to spite your own face. The fact is, it made a marvellous scenario. Here's the contract, and here's a cheque on my bank for the price—£3,000. If you like to treat me as your agent, you owe me £300. I don't ex-

pect it, but I'm not proud, like you, and I shan't sneeze."

"Good God!" he said.

"Yes, I know. But it's all nonsense, Bruce. You can carry scruples to altogether too great length. Tainted source! Everything's tainted, if you come to that. The film's a quite justified expression of modern civilisation—a natural outcome of the Age. It gives amusement; it affords pleasure. It may be vulgar, it may be cheap, but we *are* vulgar, and we *are* cheap, and it's no use pretending we're not—not you, of course, Bruce, but people at large. A vulgar Age wants vulgar amusement, and if we can give it that amusement, we ought to; life's not too cheery, anyway."

The glare in his eyes was almost paralysing me, but I managed to stammer on:

"You live out of the world—you don't realise what humdrum people want; something to balance the greyness, the—the banality of their lives. They want blood, thrill, sensation of all sorts. You didn't mean to give it them, but you have, you've done them a benefit, whether you wish to or not, and the money's yours and you've got to take it."

The cat suddenly jumped down. I waited for the storm to burst.

"I know," I dashed on, "that you hate and despise the film——"

Suddenly his voice boomed out:

"Bosh! What are you talking about? Film! I go there every other night."

It was my turn to say: "Good God!" And, ramming contract and cheque into his empty hand, I bolted, closely followed by the cat.

1923.

XLIV

LATE—299

I

1 §

IT was disconcerting to the governor. The man's smile was so peculiar. Of course these educated prisoners—doctors, solicitors, parsons—one could never say good-bye to them quite without awkwardness; couldn't dismiss them with the usual: "Shake hands! Hope you'll keep straight, and have luck." No! With the finish of his sentence a gentleman resumed a kind of equality, ceased to be a number, ceased even being a name without prefix, to which the law and the newspapers with their unfailing sense of what was proper at once reduced a prisoner on, or even before, his conviction. No: 299 was once more Dr. Philip Raider, in a suit of dark-grey tweeds, lean and limber, with grey hair grown again in readiness for the outer world, with deep-set shining eyes, and that peculiar smile—a difficult subject. The governor decided suddenly to

say only, "Well, good-bye, Dr. Raider," and, holding out his hand, he found it remain in contact with nothing.

So the fellow was going out in defiant mood—was he! The governor felt it rather hard after more than two years, and his mind retraced his recollections of this prisoner: An illegal operation case! Not a good "mixer"—not that his prisoners were allowed to mix; still, always reassuring to know that they would if not strenuously prevented! Record—Exemplary. Chaplain's report—Nothing doing or words to that effect. Work—Bookbinding. Quite! But chief memory that of a long loose figure loping round at exercise, rather like a wolf. And there he stood! The tall governor felt at the moment oddly short. He raised his hand from its posture of not too splendid isolation, and put the closure with a gesture. No: 299's lips moved:

"Is that all?"

Accustomed to being "sirred" to the last, the governor reddened. But the accent was so refined that he decided not to mention it.

"Yes, that's all."

"Thank you. Good morning."

The eyes shone from under the brows, the smile curled the lips under the long, fine, slightly hooked nose; the man loped easily to the door.

He carried his hands well. He made no noise going out. Damn! The fellow had looked so exactly as if he had been thinking: 'You poor devil!' The governor gazed round his office. Highly specialised life, no doubt! The windows had bars; it was here that he saw refractory prisoners in the morning, early. And, thrusting his hands into his pockets, he frowned. . . .

Outside, the head warder, straight, blue-clothed, grizzled, walked ahead, with a bunch of keys.

"All in order," he said to the blue-clothed janitor, "No: 299—going out. Any one waiting for him?"

"No, sir."

"Right. Open!"

The door clanged under the key.

"Good day to you," said the head warder.

The released prisoner turned his smiling face and nodded; turned it to the janitor, nodded again, and walked out between them, putting on a grey felt hat. The door clanged under the key.

"Smiling!" remarked the janitor.

"Ah! Cool customer," said the head warder. "Clever man, though, I'm told."

His voice sounded resentful, a little surprised, as if he had missed the last word by saying it. . . .

Hands in pockets, the released prisoner walked

at leisure in the centre of the pavement. An October day of misty sunshine, and the streets full of people seeking the midday meal. Chancing to glance at this passer-by, their eyes glanced away at once, as a finger flies from a too-hot iron. . . .

2 §

On the platform the prison chaplain, who had a day off and was going up to town, saw a face under a grey hat which seemed vaguely familiar.

"Yes," said a voice, "Late—299. Raider."

The chaplain felt surprise.

"Oh! Ah!" he stammered. "You went out to-day, I think. I hope you——"

"Thanks, very much."

The train came clattering in. The chaplain entered a third-class compartment; Late—299 followed. The chaplain experienced something of a shock. Extremely unlike a prisoner! And this prisoner, out of whom he had, so to speak, had no change whatever these two years past, had always made him feel uncomfortable. There he sat opposite, turning his paper, smoking a cigarette, as if on terms of perfect equality. Lowering his own journal, the chaplain looked out of the window, trying to select a course of conduct; then, conscious that he was being stared at, he took a

flying look at his *vis-à-vis*. The man's face seemed saying: 'Feel a bit awkward, don't you? But don't worry. I've no ill feeling. You have a devilish poor time.'

Unable to find the proper reply to this look, the chaplain remarked:

"Nice day. Country's looking beautiful."

Late—299 turned those shining eyes of his toward the landscape. The man had a hungry face in spite of his smile, and the chaplain asked:

"Will you have a sandwich?"

"Thanks. . . ."

"Forgive my inquiring," said the chaplain presently, blowing crumbs off his knees, "but what will you do now? I hope you're going to——" How could he put it? "Turn over a new leaf"? "Make good"? "Get going"? He could not put it, and instead took the cigarette which Late—299 was offering him. The man was speaking too; his words seemed to come slowly through the smoke, as if not yet used to a tongue.

"These last two years have been priceless."

"Ah!" said the chaplain hopefully.

"I feel right on top."

The chaplain's spirit drooped.

"Do you mean," he said, "that you don't regret—that you aren't—er——?"

"Priceless!"

The man's face had a lamentable look—steely, strangely smiling. No humility in it at all. He would find society did not tolerate such an attitude. No, indeed! He would soon discover his place.

"I'm afraid," he said kindly, "that you'll find society very unforgiving. Have you a family?"

"Wife, son, and daughter."

"How will they receive you?"

"Don't know, I'm sure."

"And your friends? I only want to prepare you a little."

"Fortunately I have private means."

The chaplain stared. What a piece of luck—or was it a misfortune?

"If I'd been breakable, your prison would have broken me. Have another cigarette?"

"No, thank you."

The chaplain felt too sad. He had always said nothing could be done with them so long as their will-power was unbroken. Distressing to see a man who had received this great lesson still so stiff-necked! And, lifting his journal, he tried to read. But those eyes seemed boring through the print. It was most uncomfortable. Oh! most! . . .

II

1 §

In the withdrawing-room of a small house near Kew Gardens, Mrs. Philip Raider was gazing at a piece of pinkish paper in her hand, as if it had been one of those spiders of which she had so constitutional a horror. Opposite her chair her son had risen, and against the wall her daughter had ceased suddenly to play Brahm's Variations on a theme by Haydn.

"He says to-night!"

The girl dropped her hands from the keys. "To-night? I thought it was next month. Just like father—without a word of warning!"

The son mechanically took out his pipe, and began polishing its bowl. He was fresh-faced, fair, with a small head.

"Why didn't he tell us to meet him in London? He must know we've got to come to an arrangement."

The daughter, too, got up, leaning against the piano—a slight figure, with bushy, dark, short hair.

"What are we to do, Mother?"

"Jack must go round, and put Mabel and Roderick off for this evening."

"Yes, and what then, if he's going to stay here?

Does he know that I'm engaged, and Beryl too?"

"I think I told him in my last letter."

"What are *you* going to do, Mother?"

"It's come so suddenly—I don't know."

"It's indecent!" said the boy violently.

His sister picked up the dropped telegram. "'Earl's Court, five four.' He may be here any minute. Jack, do hurry up! Doesn't he realise that nobody knows down here?"

Mrs. Raider turned to the fire.

"Your father will only have realised his own feelings."

"Well, he's got to realise. I'll make him——!"

"Dr. Raider, ma'am."

Late—299 stood, smiling, in front of the door which the maid had closed behind him.

"Well, Bertha?" he said. "Ah, Beryl! Well, Jack!"

His daughter alone replied.

"*Well*, Father, you might have let us know beforehand!"

Late—299 looked from one face to the other.

"Never tell children they're going to have a powder. How are you all?"

"Perfectly well, thank you. How are you?"

"Never better. Healthy life—prison!"

As if walking in her sleep Mrs. Raider came

across the room. She put out her hand with a groping gesture. Late—299 did not take it.

"Rather nice here," he said. "Can I have a wash?"

"Jack, show your father the lavatory."

"The bathroom, please."

The son crossed from the window, glanced at his father's smiling face, and led the way.

Mrs. Raider, thin, pale, dark, spoke first. "Poor Philip!"

"It's impossible to pity father, Mother; it always was. Except for his moustache being gone, I don't see much change anyway. It's you I pity. He simply can't stay here. Why! everybody thinks you're a widow."

"People generally know more than they seem to, Beryl."

"Nobody's ever given us a hint. Why couldn't he have consulted us?"

"We must think of *him*."

"He didn't think of us when he did that horrible thing. And it was so gratuitous, unless——! Mother, sometimes I've thought he had to do it; that he was her—her lover as well as her doctor!"

Mrs. Raider shook her head.

"If it had been that, he'd have told me. Your father is always justified in his own eyes."

"What am I to do about Roddy?"

"We must just wait."

"Here's Jack! Well?"

"He's having a bath as hot as he can bear it. All he said was: 'This is the first thing you do when you go in, and the first thing you do when you come out—symmetrical, isn't it?' I've got to take him up a cup of coffee. It's really too thick! The servants can't help knowing that a Dr. Raider who gets into the bath the moment he comes to call must be our father."

"It's comic."

"Is it? He doesn't show a sign of shame. He'll call it from the housetops. I thought, of course, he'd go abroad."

"We all thought that."

"If he were down in the mouth, one could feel sorry for him. But he looks as pleased as Punch with himself. And it's such a beastly sort of crime —how am I to put it to Mabel? If I just say he's been in prison, she'll think it's something even worse. Mother, do insist on his going at once. We can tell the servants he's an uncle—who's been in contact with smallpox."

"*You* take him the coffee, Mother—oh! you can't, if he's to be an uncle! Jack, tell him nobody here knows, and mother can't stand it, and hurry up! It's half past six now."

The son passed his fingers through his brushed-back hair; his face looked youthful, desperate.

"Shall I?"

Mrs. Raider nodded.

"Tell him, Jack, that I'll come out to him, wherever he likes to go; that I always expected him to arrange that; that this is—too difficult——" She covered her lips with her hand.

"All right, Mother! I'll jolly well make him understand. But don't launch out about it to the servants yet. Suppose it's we who have to go? It's his house!"

"Is it, Mother?"

"Yes, I bought it with his money under the power of attorney he left."

"Oh! Isn't that dreadful?"

"It's *all* dreadful, but we must consider *him*."

The girl shook back her fuzzy hair.

"It does seem rather a case of 'coldly received.' But father's always been shut up in himself. He can't expect us suddenly to slobber over him. If he's had a horrible time, so have we."

"Well, shall I go?"

"Yes, take him the coffee. Be quick, my dear boy, and be nice to him!"

The son said with youthful grimness, "Oh! I'll be nice!" and went.

"Mother, don't look like that!"

"How should I look? Smiling?"

"No, don't smile—it's like him. Cry it off your chest."

2 §

Late—299 was sitting in the bath, smiling through steam and the smoke of his cigarette, at his big toe. Raised just above the level of the water, it had a nail blackened by some weight that had dropped on it. He took the coffee-cup from his son's hand.

"For two years and nine months I've been looking forward to this—but it beats the band, Jack."

"Father—I ought to——"

"Good coffee, tobacco, hot water—greatest blessings earth affords. Half an hour in here, and —spotless, body and soul!"

"Father——!"

"Yes, is there anything you want to add?"

"We've—we've been here two years."

"Not so long as I was there. Do you like it?"

"Yes."

"I didn't. Are you studying medicine?"

"No. Botany."

"Good. You won't have to do with human beings."

"I've got the promise of a job in the gardens

here at the beginning of next year. I'm—I'm engaged."

"Excellent. I believe in marrying young."

"Beryl's engaged too."

"Your mother isn't, by any chance?"

"Father!"

"My dear fellow, one expects to have been dropped. Why suppose one's family superior to other people's? *Pas si bête!*"

Gazing at that smiling face where prison pallor was yielding to the heat, above the neck whose sinews seemed unnaturally sharp and visible, the boy felt a spasm of remorse.

"We've never had a proper chance to tell you how frightfully sorry we've been for you. Only, we don't understand even now why you did such a thing."

"Should I have done it if I'd thought it would have been spotted? A woman going to the devil; a small risk to oneself—and there we were! Never save any one at risk to yourself, Jack. I'm sure you agree."

The boy's face went very red. How could he ever get out what he had come to say?

"I have no intention of putting my tail between my legs. D'you mind taking this cup?"

"Will you have another, Father?"

"No, thanks. What time do you dine?"

"Half past seven."

"You might lend me a razor. I was shaved this morning with a sort of bill-hook."

"I'll get you one."

Away from that smiling stranger in the bath, the boy shook himself. He must and would speak out!

When he came back with the shaving gear, his father was lying flat, deeply immersed, with closed eyes. And setting his back against the door, he blurted out: "Nobody knows down here. They think mother's a widow."

The eyes opened, the smile resumed control.

"Do you really think that?"

"I do; I know that Mabel—the girl I'm engaged to—has no suspicion. She's coming to dinner; so is Roddy Blades—Beryl's *fiancé*."

"Mabel, and Roddy Blades—glad to know their names. Give me that big towel, there's a good fellow. I'm going to wash my head."

Handing him the towel, the boy turned. But at the door he stopped. "Father——!"

"Quite. These natural relationships are fixed, beyond redemption."

The boy turned and fled.

His mother and sister stood waiting at the foot of the stairs.

"Well?"

"It's no good. I simply can't tell him we want him to go."

"No, my dear. I understand."

"Oh! but, Mother——! Jack, you must."

"I can't, I'm going to put them off." Seizing his hat, he ran. He ran between small houses in the evening mist, trying to invent. At the corner of the long row of little villas, he rang a bell.

"Can I see Miss Mabel?"

"She's dressing, sir. Will you come in?"

"No. I'll wait here."

In the dark porch he tried hard to rehearse himself. Awfully sorry! Somebody had come—unexpectedly—on business! Yes! On what business?

"Hallo, Jack!"

A vision in the doorway—a fair head, a rosy, round, blue-eyed face above a swansdown collar.

"Look here, darling—shut the door."

"Why? What is it? Anything up?"

"Yes, something pretty badly up. You can't come to-night, Mabel."

"Don't squeeze so hard! Why not?"

"Oh! well—there—there's a reason."

"I know. Your father's come out!"

"What? How——?"

"But of course. We all know about it. We must be awfully nice to him."

"D'you mean to say that Roddy and everybody—— We thought nobody knew."

"Bless you, yes! Some people feel one way, and some the other. I feel the other."

"Do you know what he did?"

"Yes, I got hold of the paper. I read the whole trial."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Why didn't *you?*"

"It was too beastly. Well?"

"I think it was a shame."

"But you can't have that sort of thing allowed."

"Why not?"

"Where would the population be?"

"Well, we're overpopulated. Everybody says so."

"That's quite another thing. This is the law."

"Look here! If you want to argue, come in. It's jolly cold."

"I don't want to argue; I must go and tell Roddy. It's an awful relief about you, darling. Only—you don't know my father."

"Then I can't come?"

"Not to-night. Mother——"

"Yes, I expect she's frightfully glad."

"Oh! yes—yes! She—yes!"

"Well, good night. And look here—you go back. *I'll* tell Roddy. No! Don't rumple me!"

Running back between small houses, the boy thought: 'Good God! How queer! How upside down! She—she——! It's awfully modern!'

3 §

Late—299 sat in the firelight, a glass beside him, a cigarette betwen his smiling lips. The cinders clicked; the clock struck. Eleven! He pitched the stump of his cigarette into the ashes, stretched himself, and rose. He went up-stairs and opened the first door. The room was dark. A faint voice said:

"Philip?"

"Yes."

The light sprang out under his thumb. His wife was sitting up in bed, her face pale, her lips moving:

"To-night—must you?"

Late—299 moved to the foot of the bed; his lips still smiled, his eyes gazed hungrily.

"Not at all. We learn to contain ourselves in prison. No vile contacts? Quite so. Good night!"

The voice from the bed said faintly:

"Philip, I'm so sorry; it's the suddenness—I'm——"

"Don't mention it." The light failed under his thumb. The door fell to. . . .

Three people lay awake, one sleeping. The three who lay awake were thinking: 'If only he made one feel sorry for him! If only one could love him! His self-control is forbidding—it's not human! He ought to want our sympathy. He ought to sympathise with us. He doesn't seem to feel—for himself, for us, for anything. And to-morrow what will happen? Is life possible here, now? Can we stand him in the house, about the place? He's—frightening!'

The sleeper, in his first bed of one thousand and one nights, lay, with eyes pinched up between brows and bony cheeks of a face as if carved from ivory, and lips still smiling at the softness under him.

Past dawn the wakeful slept, the sleeper awoke. His eyes sought the familiar little pyramid of gear on the shelf in the corner, the bright tins below, the round port-hole, the line of distemper running along the walls, the closed and solid smallness of a cell. And the blood left his heart. They weren't there! His whole being struggled with such unreality. He was in a room staring at light coming through chintz curtains. His arms were not naked. This was a sheet! For a moment he shivered, uncertain of everything; then lay back, smiling at a papered ceiling.

III

1 §

"It can't go on, Mother. It simply can't. I feel an absolute worm whenever I'm with him. I shall have to clear out, like Beryl. He has just one object all the time—to make every one feel small and mean."

"Remember what he's been through!"

"I don't see why *we* should be part of his revenge. We've done nothing, except suffer through him."

"He doesn't want to hurt us or any one."

"Well, whenever people talk to him, they dry up, at once, as if he'd skinned them. It's a disease."

"One can only pity him."

"He's perfectly happy, Mother. He's getting his own back."

"If only that first night——"

"We tried. It's no good. He's absolutely self-sufficient. What about to-morrow night?"

"We can't leave him on Christmas Day, Jack."

"Then we must take him to Beryl's. I can't stick it here. Look! There he goes!"

Late—299 passed the window where they stood, loping easily, a book under his arm.

"He must have seen us. We mightn't exist!..."

2 §

Late—299, with the book under his arm, entered Kew Gardens and sat down on a bench. A nursery governess with her charges came and settled down beside him.

"Peter, Joan, and Michael," said Late—299, "quite in the fashion."

The governess stirred uneasily; the gentleman looked funny, smiling there!

"And what are you teaching them?"

"Reading, writing, and arithmetic, sir, and Bible stories."

"Intelligent? . . . Ah! Not very. Truthful? . . . No! No children are."

The governess twisted her hands. "Peter!" she said, "where's your ball? We must go and look for it."

"But I've got it, Miss Somers."

"Oh! Well, it's too sharp, sitting here. Come along!"

She passed away, and Peter, Joan, and Michael trailed after.

Late—299 smiled on; and a Pekinese, towing a stout old lady, smelled at his trousers.

"It's my cat," said Late—299. "Dogs and cats their pleasure is——"

Picking up the Pekinese, the stout old lady

pressed it under her arm as though it were a bagpipe, and hurried on like a flustered goose.

Some minutes passed. A workman and his wife sat down to gaze at the pagoda.

"Queer building!" said Late—299.

"Ah!" said the workman. "Japanese, they say!"

"Chinese, my friend. Good people, the Chinese—no regard for human life."

"What's that? Good—did you say?"

"Quite!"

"Eh?"

The workman's wife peered round him.

"Come on, John! The sun gits in me eyes e're."

The workman rose. "'Good,' you said, didn't you? *Good* people?"

"Yes."

The workman's wife drew at his arm. "There, don't get arguin' with strangers. Come on!" The workman was drawn away. . . .

A clock struck twelve. Late—299 got up and left the gardens. Walking between small houses, he rang at the side entrance of a little shop.

"If your father's still blind—I've come to read to him again."

"Please, sir, he'll always be."

"So I supposed."

On a horsehair sofa, below the dyed-red plumes of pampas-grass, a short and stocky man was sitting, whittling at a wooden figure. He sniffed, and turned his sightless eyes toward his visitor; his square face in every line and bump seemed saying: "You don't down me."

"What are you making?" said Late—299.

"Christmas Eve. I'm cuttin' out our Lord. I make 'em rather nice. Would you like this one?"

"Thank you."

"Kep' 'Is end up well, our Lord, didn't He? 'Love your neighbor as yourself'—that means you got to love yourself. And He did, I think; not against Him, neither."

"Easier to love your neighbors when you can't see them, eh?"

"What's that? D'you mind lendin' me your face a minute? It'll help me a lot with this 'ere. I make 'em lifelike, you know."

Late—299 leaned forward, and the tips of the blind man's fingers explored his features.

"'Igh cheek-bones, eyes back in the 'ead, supraorbital ridges extra special, rather low forehead slopin' to thick hair. Comin' down, two 'ollers under the cheek-bones, thin nose a bit 'ooky, chin sharpish, no moustache. You've got a smile, 'aven't you? And your own teeth? I should say you'd make a very good model. I don't 'old

with 'Im always 'avin' a beard. Would you like the figure 'angin', or carryin' the cross?"

"As you wish. D'you ever use your own face?"

"Not for 'Im—for statesmen, or 'eroes, I do. I done one of Captain Scott with my face. Rather pugnacious, my style; yours is sharp, bit acid, suitable to saints, martyrs, and that. I'll just go over you once more—then I'll 'ave it all 'ere. Sharp neck; bit 'unchy in one shoulder; ears stick up a bit; tallish thin man, ain't you, and throw your feet forward when you walk? Give us your 'and a minute. Bite your fingers, I see. Eyes blue, eh—with pin-points to 'em—yes? Hair a bit reddish before it went piebald—that right? Thank you, much obliged. Now, if you like to read, I'll get on with it."

Late—299 opened the book.

"'. . . But at last in the drift of time Hadleyburg had the ill luck to offend a passing stranger, possibly without knowing it, certainly without caring, for Hadleyburg was sufficient unto itself and cared not a rap for strangers and their opinions. Still, it would have been well to make an exception in this one's case, for he was a bitter man and revengeful.'"

"Ah!" interjected the blind man deeply, "there you 'ave it. Talkin' of feelin's, what gave you a fellow-feelin' for me, if I may ask?"

"I can look at you, my friend, without your seeing me."

"Eh! What about it with other people, then?"

"They can look at me without my seeing them."

"I see! Misanthropical. Any reason for that?"

"Prison."

"What oh! Outcast and rejected of men."

"No. The other way on."

The blind man ceased to whittle and scoop.

"I like independence," he said; "I like a man that can go his own way. Ever noticed cats? Men are like dogs mostly; only once in a way you get a man that's like a cat. What *were* you, if it's not a rude question. In the taxes?"

"Medico."

"What's a good thing for 'eartburn?"

"Which kind?"

"Wind, ain't it? But I see your meanin'. Losin' my sight used to burn my 'eart a lot; but I got over that. What's the use? You couldn't have any worse misfortune. It gives you a feelin' of bein' insured-like."

"You're right," said Late—299, rising to go.

The blind man lifted his face in unison. "Got your smile on?" he said. "Just let me 'ave another feel at it, will you?"

Late—299 bent to the outstretched fingers.

"Yes," said the blind man, "same with you—touched bottom. Next time you come I'll 'ave something on show that'll please you, I think; and thank you for readin'."

"Let me know if it bores you."

"I will," said the blind man, following without movement the footsteps of his visitor that died away.

3 §

Christmas night—wild and windy, a shower spattering down in the street; Late—299 walking two yards before his wife, their son walking two yards behind his mother. A light figure, furred to the ears, in a doorway watching for them.

"Come along, darling. Sorry we had to bring him."

"Of course you had to, Jack!"

"Look! He can't even walk with mother. It's a disease. He went to church to-day, and all through the sermon never took his eyes off—the poor old vicar nearly broke down."

"What was it about?"

"Brotherly love. Mother says he doesn't mean it—but it's like—what's that thing that stares?"

"A basilisk. I've been trying to put myself in his place, Jack. He must have swallowed blood

and tears in there—ordered about like a dog, by common men, for three years nearly. If you don't go under, you must become inhuman. This is better than if he'd come out crawling."

"Perhaps. Look out—the rain! I'll turn your hood up, darling." A spattering shower, the whispering hushed. . . .

A lighted open doorway, a red hall, a bunch of hanging mistletoe, a girl beneath, with bushy hair.

"Happy Christmas, father!"

"Thanks. Do you want to be kissed?"

"As you like. Well, Mother darling! Hallo, you two! Come in! Roddy, take father's coat."

"How are you, sir? Beastly weather!"

"That was the advantage we had in prison. Weather never troubled us. 'Peace and Goodwill' in holly-berries!—Very neat! They used to stick them up in there. Christianity is a really remarkable fraud, don't you think? . . ."

Once again those four in the street, and the bells chiming for midnight service.

"What an evening!"

"Let them get out of hearing, Jack."

"Worse than ever! My God, he'd turn the milk sour! And I thought liquor might make him possible. He drank quite a lot."

"Only a few days now, and then! . . ."

"Do you agree with mother that he doesn't mean it, Mabel?"

"Oh! yes, I do."

"The way he sits and smiles! Why doesn't he get himself a desert?"

"Perhaps he is. . . ."

4 §

"'Ere you are!" said the blind man. "Best I can do under the circs. 'Ad a bit o' trouble with the cross; got it top-'eavy, I'm afraid; but thought you'd rather carry it."

"Quite a masterpiece!"

"Speaking serious?" said the blind man. "You could improve it with a box o' colors; make it more 'uman like."

"I'll do that."

"I wouldn't touch the face, nor the cross—leave 'em wooden; but the hair and the dress, and the blood from the crown o' thorns might be all the better for a bit o' brightenin'. How's the man that corrupted 'Adleyburg?"

Late—299 opened the book.

"'. . . Goodson looked him over, like as if he was hunting for a place on him that he could despise the most; then he says: "So you are the Committee of Inquiry, are you?" Sawlsberry

said that was about what he was. "H'm! Do they require particulars, or do you reckon a kind of *general* answer will do?" "If they require particulars I will come back, Mr. Goodson; I will take the general answer first." "Very well, then; tell them to go to hell—I reckon that's general enough. And I'll give you some advice, Sawlsberry; when you come back for the particulars, fetch a basket to carry what's left of yourself home in.'"

The blind man chuckled.

"Ah! I like that Mark Twain. Nice sense o' humor—nothin' sickly."

"Bark and quinine, eh?"

"Bark and bite," said the blind man. "What do you think of 'uman nature yourself?"

"Little or nothing."

"And yet there's a bit of all right about it, too. Look at you and me; we got our troubles, and 'ere we are—jolly as sandboys! Be self-sufficient, or you've got to suffer. That's what you feel, ain't it? Am I mistook, or did you nod?"

"I did. Your eyes look as if they saw."

"Bright, are they? You and me could 'ave sat down and cried 'em out any time—couldn't we? But we didn't. That's why I say there's a bit of all right about us. Put the world from you, and keep your pecker up. When you can't think worse

of things than what you do, you'll be 'appy—not before. That's right, ain't it?"

"Quite."

"Took me five years. 'Ow long were you about it?"

"Nearly three."

"Well, you 'ad the advantage of birth and edjucation; I can tell that from your voice—got a thin, mockin' sound. I started in a barber's shop, got mine in an accident with some 'air-curlers. What I miss most is not bein' able to go fishin'. No one to take me. Don't you miss cuttin' people up?"

"No."

"Well, I suppose a gent never gets a passion; I'd a perfect passion for fishin'. Never missed Sunday, wet or fine. That's why I learned this carvin'—must 'ave an 'obby to go on with. Are you goin' to write your 'istory? Am I wrong, or did you shake your 'ead?"

"I did. My hobby is watching the show go by."

"That might 'ave suited me at one time—always liked to see the river flowin' down. I'm a bit of a philosopher myself. You ain't, I should say."

"Why not?"

"Well, I've a fancy you want life to come to heel too much—misfortune of bein' a gent, perhaps. Am I right?"

Late—299 closed the book and rose. "Pride!" he said.

"Ah!" said the blind man, groping with his eyes, "that's meat and drink to you. Thought as much. Come again, if I don't worry you."

"And take you fishing?"

"Reelly? You will? Shake 'ands."

Late—299 put out his hand. The blind man's groped up and found it. . . .

5 §

"Wednesday again, is it, partner, if I'm not troublin' you?"

"Wednesday it is."

At the door of his house, with the "catch" in a straw bag, the blind man stood a minute listening to his partner's footsteps, then felt his way to his horse-hair sofa under the pampas-grass. Putting his cold feet up under the rug, he heaved a sigh of satisfaction, and fell asleep.

Between the bare acacias and lilac-bushes of the little villas, Late—299 passed on. Entering his house, he sought his study, and stretched his feet toward the fire, and the cat, smelling him fishy, sprang on to his knee.

"Philip, may I come in?"

"You may."

"The servants have given notice. I wanted to

say, wouldn't you like to give this up and go abroad with me?"

"Why this sudden sacrifice?"

"Oh, Philip! You make it so hard for me. What do you really want me to do?"

"Take half my income and go away."

"What will you do, here, alone?"

"Get me a char. The cat and I love chars."

"Philip!"

"Yes?"

"Won't you tell me what's in your heart? Do you want always to be lonely like this?"

Late—299 looked up.

"Reality means nothing to those who haven't lived with it. I do."

"But why?"

"My dear Bertha—that is your name, I think?"

"Oh, God! You *are* terrible!"

"What would you have me—a whining worm? Crawling to people I despise—squirming from false position to false position? Do you want humility? What is it you want?"

"I want you to be human."

"Then you want what you have got. I *am* so human that I'll see the world damned before I take its pity, or eat its salt. Leave me alone. I am content."

"Is there nothing I can do?"

"Yes, stand out of my firelight. . . ."

6 §

Two figures, in the dark outside, before the uncurtained window.

"Look, Mabel!"

"Be careful! He may see. Whisper!"

"The window's shut."

"Oh! Why doesn't he draw the blinds—if he must sit like that!

> "'A desert dark without a sound
> And not a drop to eat or drink
> And a dark desert all around!'

Jack, I pity him."

"He doesn't suffer. It's being fond of people makes you suffer. He's got all he wants. Look at him."

The firelight on the face—its points and hollows, its shining eyes, its stillness and intensity, its smile; and on the cat, hunched and settled in the curve of the warm body. And the two young people, shrinking back, pass on between small houses, clutching each other's hands.

1923.

XLV

HAD A HORSE

I

SOME quarter of a century ago, there abode in Oxford a small bookmaker called James Shrewin —or more usually 'Jimmy,' a run-about and damped-down little man, who made a precarious living out of the effect of horses on undergraduates. He had a so-called office just off the 'Corn,' where he was always open to the patronage of the young bloods of Bullingdon, and other horse-loving coteries, who bestowed on him sufficient money to enable him to live. It was through the conspicuous smash of one of them—young Gardon Colquhoun—that he became the owner of a horse. He had been far from wanting what was in the nature of a white elephant to one of his underground habits, but had taken it in discharge of betting debts, to which, of course, in the event of bankruptcy, he would have no legal claim. She was a three-year-old chestnut filly, by Lopez out of Calendar, bore the name Calliope,

and was trained out on the Downs near Wantage. On a Sunday afternoon, then, in late July 'Jimmy' got his friend, George Pulcher, the publican, to drive him out there in his sort of dog-cart.

"Must 'ave a look at the bilkin' mare," he had said; "that young 'Cocoon' told me she was a corker; but what's third to Referee at Sandown, and never ran as a two-year-old? All I know is, she's eatin' 'er 'ead off!"

Beside the plethoric bulk of Pulcher, clad in a light-coloured box cloth coat with enormous whitish buttons and a full-blown rose in the lapel, 'Jimmy's' little, thin, dark-clothed form, withered by anxiety and gin, was, as it were, invisible; and compared with Pulcher's setting sun, his face, with shaven cheeks sucked-in, and smudged-in eyes, was like a ghost's under a grey bowler. He spoke off-handedly about his animal, but he was impressed, in a sense abashed, by his ownership. 'What the 'ell?' was his constant thought. Was he going to race her, sell her—what? How, indeed, to get back out of her the sum he had been fool enough to let 'young Cocoon' owe him, to say nothing of her trainer's bill? The notion, too, of having to confront that trainer with his ownership was oppressive to one whose whole life was passed in keeping out of the

foreground of the picture. Owner! He had never owned even a white mouse, let alone a white elephant. And an 'orse would ruin him in no time if he didn't look alive about it!

The son of a small London baker, devoted to errandry at the age of fourteen, 'Jimmy' Shrewin owed his profession to a certain smartness at sums, a dislike of baking, and an early habit of hanging about street corners with other boys, who had their daily pennies on an 'orse. He had a narrow, calculating head, which pushed him towards street corner books before he was eighteen. From that time on he had been a surreptitious nomad, till he had silted up at Oxford, where, owing to Vice-Chancellors, an expert in underground life had greater scope than elsewhere. When he sat solitary at his narrow table in the back room near 'the Corn'—for he had no clerk or associate—eyeing the door, with his lists in a drawer before him, and his black shiny betting book ready for young 'bloods,' he had a sharp, cold, furtive air, and but for a certain imitated tightness of trouser, and a collar standing up all round, gave no impression of ever having heard of the quadruped called horse. Indeed, for 'Jimmy' 'horse' was a newspaper quantity with figures against its various names. Even when, for a short spell, hanger-on to a firm

of cheap-Ring bookmakers, he had seen almost nothing of horse; his racecourse hours were spent ferreting among a bawling, perspiring crowd, or hanging round within earshot of tight-lipped nobs, trainers, jockeys, anyone who looked like having 'information.' Now-a-days he never went near a race-meeting—his business, of betting on races, giving him no chance—yet his conversation seldom deviated for more than a minute at a time from that physically unknown animal the horse. The ways of making money out of it, infinite, intricate, variegated, occupied the mind in all his haunts, to the accompaniment of liquid and tobacco. Gin and bitters was 'Jimmy's' drink; for choice he smoked cheroots; and he would cherish in his mouth the cold stump of one long after it had gone out, for the homely feeling it gave him, while he talked, or listened to talk on horses. He was of that vast number, town bred, who, like crows round a carcase, feed on that which to them is not alive. And now he had a horse!

The dog-cart travelled at a clinking pace behind Pulcher's bob-tail. 'Jimmy's' cheroot burned well in the warm July air; the dust powdered his dark clothes and pinched, sallow face. He thought with malicious pleasure of that young spark 'Cocoon's' collapse—high-'anded lot of

young fools, thinking themselves so knowing; many were the grins, and not few the grittings of his blackened teeth he had to smother at their swagger. 'Jimmy, you robber!' 'Jimmy, you little blackguard!' Young sparks—gay and languid—well, one of 'em had gone out!

He looked round with his screwed-up eyes at his friend George Pulcher, who, man and licensed victualler, had his bally independence; lived remote from 'the Quality' in his Paradise, 'The Green Dragon'; had not to kow-tow to anyone; went to Newbury, Gatwick, Stockbridge, here and there, at will. Ah! George Pulcher had the ideal life—and looked it: crimson, square, full-bodied. Judge of a horse, too, in his own estimation; a leery bird—for whose judgment 'Jimmy' had respect—who got 'the office' of any clever work as quick as most men! And he said:

"What am I going to do with this blinkin' 'orse, George?"

Without moving its head the oracle spoke, in a voice rich and raw: "Let's 'ave a look at her, first, Jimmy! Don't like her name—Callĭōpe; but you can't change what's in the Stud-book. This Jenning that trains 'er is a crusty chap."

'Jimmy' nervously sucked-in his lips. The cart was mounting through the hedgeless fields which fringed the Downs; larks were singing,

the wheat was very green, and patches of charlock brightened everything; it was lonely, few trees, few houses, no people, extreme peace, just a few rooks crossing under a blue sky.

"Wonder if he'll offer us a drink?" said 'Jimmy.'

"Not he; but help yourself, my son."

'Jimmy' helped himself from a large wicker-covered flask.

"Good for you, George—here's how!"

The large man shifted the reins and drank, in turn, tilting up a face whose jaw still struggled to assert itself against chins and neck.

"Well, here's your bloomin' horse," he said. "She can't win the Derby now, but she may do us a bit of good yet."

II

The trainer, Jenning, coming from his Sunday afternoon round of the boxes, heard the sound of wheels. He was a thin man, neat in clothes and boots, medium in height, with a slight limp, narrow grey whiskers, thin shaven lips, eyes sharp and grey.

A dog-cart stopping at his yard-gate and a rum-looking couple of customers!

"Well, gentlemen?"

"Mr. Jenning? My name's Pulcher—George

Pulcher. Brought a client of yours over to see his new mare. Mr. James Shrewin, Oxford city."

'Jimmy' got down and stood before his trainer's uncompromising stare.

"What mare's that?" said Jenning.

"Callĭōpe."

"Callĭōpe—Mr. Colquhoun's?"

'Jimmy' held out a letter.

"Dear Jenning,

"I have sold Calliope to Jimmy Shrewin, the Oxford bookie. He takes her with all engagements and liabilities, including your training bill. I'm frightfully sick at having to part with her, but needs must when the devil drives.

Gardon Colquhoun."

The trainer folded the letter.

"Got proof of registration?"

'Jimmy' drew out another paper.

The trainer inspected it, and called out: "Ben, bring out Calliope. Excuse me a minute," and he walked into his house.

'Jimmy' stood, shifting from leg to leg. Mortification had set in; the dry abruptness of the trainer had injured even a self-esteem starved from youth.

The voice of Pulcher boomed. "Told you he was a crusty devil. 'And 'im a bit of his own."

The trainer was coming back.

"My bill," he said. "When you've paid it you can have the mare. I train for gentlemen."

"The hell you do!" said Pulcher.

'Jimmy' said nothing, staring at the bill—seventy-eight pounds three shillings! A buzzing fly settled in the hollow of his cheek, and he did not even brush it off. Seventy-eight pound!

The sound of hoofs roused him. Here came his horse, throwing up her head as if enquiring why she was being disturbed a second time on Sunday! In the movement of that small head and satin neck was something free and beyond present company.

"There she is," said the trainer. "That'll do, Ben. Stand, girl!"

Answering to a jerk or two of the halter, the mare stood kicking slightly with a white hind foot and whisking her tail. Her bright coat shone in the sunlight, and little shivers and wrinklings passed up and down its satin because of the flies. Then, for a moment, she stood still, ears pricked, eyes on the distance.

'Jimmy' approached her. She had resumed her twitchings, swishings, and slight kicking, and at a respectful distance he circled, bending as if looking at crucial points. He knew what her sire and dam had done, and all the horses that

had beaten, or been beaten by them; could have retailed by the half hour the peculiar hearsay of their careers; and here was their offspring in flesh and blood, and he was dumb! He didn't know a thing about what she ought to look like, and he knew it; but he felt obscurely moved. She seemed to him 'a picture.'

Completing his circle, he approached her head, white-blazed, thrown up again in listening, or scenting, and gingerly he laid his hand on her neck, warm and smooth as a woman's shoulder. She paid no attention to his touch, and he took his hand away. Ought he to look at her teeth or feel her legs? No, he was not buying her, she was his already; but he must say something. He looked round. The trainer was watching him with a little smile. For almost the first time in his life the worm turned in 'Jimmy' Shrewin; he spoke no word and walked back to the cart.

"Take her in," said Jenning.

From his seat beside Pulcher, 'Jimmy' watched the mare returning to her box.

"When I've cashed your cheque," said the trainer, "you can send for her"; and, turning on his heel, he went towards his house. The voice of Pulcher followed him.

"Blast your impudence! Git on, bob-tail, we'll shake the dust off 'ere."

Among the fringing fields the dog-cart hurried away. The sun slanted, the heat grew less, the colour of young wheat and of the charlock brightened.

"The tyke! By Gawd, 'Jimmy,' I'd 'ave hit him on the mug! But you've got one there. She's a bit o' blood, my boy; and I know the trainer for her, Polman—no blasted airs about 'im."

'Jimmy' sucked at his cheroot.

"I ain't had your advantages, George, and that's a fact. I got into it too young, and I'm a little chap. But I'll send the . . . my cheque to-morrow. I got my pride, I 'ope." It was the first time that thought had ever come to him.

III

Though not quite the centre of the Turf, the Green Dragon had nursed a *coup* in its day, nor was it without a sense of veneration. The ownership of Calliope invested 'Jimmy' Shrewin with the importance of those out of whom something can be had. It took time for one so long accustomed to beck and call, to mole-like procedure, and the demeanour of young bloods to realise that he had it. But slowly, with the marked increase of his unpaid-for cheroots, with the way in which glasses hung suspended when he came in,

with the edgings up to him, and a certain tendency to accompany him along the street, it dawned on him that he was not only an out-of-bounds bookie, but a man. So long as he had remained unconscious of his double nature he had been content with laying the odds, as best he might, and getting what he could out of every situation, straight or crooked. Now that he was also a man, his complacency was ruffled. He suffered from a growing headiness connected with his horse. She was trained, now, by Polman, further along the Downs, too far for Pulcher's bob-tail; and though her public life was carried on at the Green Dragon, her private life required a train journey over night. 'Jimmy' took it twice a week—touting his own horse in the August mornings up on the Downs, without drink or talk, or even cheroots. Early morning, larks singing, and the sound of galloping hoofs! In a moment of expansion he confided to Pulcher that it was 'bally 'olesome.'

There had been the slight difficulty of being mistaken for a tout by his new trainer Polman, a stoutish man with the look of one of those large sandy Cornish cats, not precisely furtive because reticence and craft are their nature. But, that once over, his personality swelled slowly. This month of August was one of those interludes, in

fact, when nothing happens, but which shape the future by secret ripening.

An error to suppose that men conduct finance, high or low, from greed, or love of gambling; they do it out of self-esteem, out of an itch to prove their judgment superior to their neighbours', out of a longing for importance. George Pulcher did not despise the turning of a penny, but he valued much more the consciousness that men were saying: "Old George, what 'e says goes —knows a thing or two—George Pulcher!"

To pull the strings of 'Jimmy' Shrewin's horse was a rich and subtle opportunity absorbingly improvable. But first one had to study the animal's engagements, and, secondly, to gauge that unknown quantity, her 'form.' To make anything of her this year they must 'get about it.' That young 'toff,' her previous owner, had of course, flown high, entering her for classic races, high-class handicaps, neglecting the rich chances of lesser occasions.

Third to Referee in the three-year-old race at Sandown Spring—two heads—was all that was known of her, and now they had given her seven two in the Cambridgeshire. She might have a chance, and again she might not. He sat two long evenings with 'Jimmy' in the little private room off the bar, deliberating this grave question.

'Jimmy' inclined to the bold course. He kept saying: "The mare's a flyer, George—she's the 'ell of a flyer!"

"Wait till she's been tried," said the oracle.

Had Polman anything that would give them a line?

Yes, he had The Shirker (named with that irony which appeals to the English), one of the most honest four-year-olds that ever looked through bridle, who had run up against almost every animal of mark—the one horse that Polman never interfered with, for if interrupted in his training, he ran all the better; who seldom won, but was almost always placed—the sort of horse that handicappers pivot on.

"But," said Pulcher, "try her with The Shirker, and the first stable money will send her up to tens. That 'orse is so darned regular. We've got to throw a bit of dust first, 'Jimmy.' I'll go over and see Polman."

In 'Jimmy's' withered chest a faint resentment rose—it wasn't George's horse; but it sank again beneath his friend's bulk and reputation.

The 'bit of dust' was thrown at the ordinary hour of exercise over the Long Mile on the last day of August—the five-year-old Hangman carrying eight stone seven, the three-year-old Parrot seven stone five; what Calliope was carry-

ing nobody but Polman knew. The forethought of George Pulcher had secured the unofficial presence of the Press. The instructions to the boy on Calliope were to be there at the finish if he could, but on no account to win. 'Jimmy' and George Pulcher had come out over night. They sat together in the dog-cart by the clump of bushes which marked the winning-post, with Polman on his cob on the far side.

By a fine, warm light the three horses were visible to the naked eye in the slight dip down by the start. And, through the glasses, invested in now that he had a horse, "Jimmy" could see every movement of his mare with her blazed face—rather on her toes, like the bright chestnut and 'bit o' blood' she was. He had a pit-patting in his heart, and his lips were tight pressed. Suppose she was no good after all, and that young 'Cocoon' had palmed him off a pup! But mixed in with his financial fear was an anxiety more intimate, as if his own value were at stake.

From George Pulcher came an almost excited gurgle.

"See the tout! See 'im behind that bush. Thinks we don't know 'e's there, wot oh!"

'Jimmy' bit into his cheroot. "They're running," he said.

Rather wide, the black Hangman on the far

side, Calliope in the middle, they came sweeping up the long mile. 'Jimmy' held his tobaccoed breath. The mare was going freely—a length or two behind—making up her ground! Now for it!——

Ah! she 'ad the 'Angman beat, and ding-dong with this Parrot! It was all he could do to keep from calling out. With a rush and a cludding of hoofs they passed—the blazed nose just behind the Parrot's bay nose—dead heat all but, with the Hangman beat a good length!

"There 'e goes, 'Jimmy'! See the blank scuttlin' down the 'ill like a blinkin' rabbit. That'll be in to-morrow's paper, that trial will. Ah! but 'ow to read it—that's the point."

The horses had been wheeled and were sidling back; Polman was going forward on his cob.

'Jimmy' jumped down. Whatever that fellow had to say, he meant to hear. It was his horse! Narrowly avoiding the hoofs of his hot, fidgeting mare, he said sharply:

"What about it?"

Polman never looked you in the face; his speech came as if not intended to be heard by anyone:

"Tell Mr. Shrewin how she went."

"Had a bit up my sleeve. If I'd hit her a smart one, I could ha' landed by a length or more."

"That so?" said 'Jimmy' with a hiss. "Well, *don't* you hit her; she don't want hittin'. You remember that."

The boy said sulkily: "All right!"

"Take her home," said Polman. Then, with that reflective averted air of his, he added: "She was carrying eight stone, Mr. Shrewin; you've got a good one there. She's the Hangman at level weights."

Something wild leaped up in 'Jimmy'—the Hangman's form unrolled itself before him in the air—he had a horse—he dam' well had a horse!

IV

But how delicate is the process of backing your fancy! The planting of a commission—what tender and efficient work before it will flower! That sixth sense of the racing man, which, like the senses of savages in great forests, seizes telepathically on what is not there, must be dulled, duped, deluded.

George Pulcher had the thing in hand. One might have thought the gross man incapable of such a fairy touch, such power of sowing with one hand and reaping with the other. He intimated rather than asserted that Callĭōpe and the Parrot were one and the same thing. "The

Parrot," he said, "couldn't win with seven stone —no use thinkin' of this Callĭōpe."

Local opinion was the rock on which, like a great tactician, he built. So long as local opinion was adverse, he could dribble money on in London; the natural jump-up from every long shot taken was dragged back by the careful radiation of disparagement from the seat of knowledge.

'Jimmy' was the fly in his ointment of those balmy early weeks while snapping up every penny of long odds, before suspicion could begin to work from the persistence of enquiry. Half-a-dozen times he found the 'little cuss within an ace of blowing the gaff on his own blinkin' mare'; seemed unable to run his horse down; the little beggar's head was swellin'! Once 'Jimmy' had even got up and gone out, leaving a gin and bitters untasted on the bar. Pulcher improved on his absence in the presence of a London tout.

"Saw the trial meself! 'Jimmy' don't like to think he's got a stiff 'un."

And next morning his London agent snapped up some thirty-threes again.

According to the trial the mare was the Hangman at seven stone two, and really hot stuff—a seven-to-one chance. It was none the less with a sense of outrage that, opening the *Sporting Life*

on the last day of September, he found her quoted at 100—8. Whose work was this?

He reviewed the altered situation in disgust. He had invested about half the stable commission of three hundred pounds at an average of thirty-to-one, but, now that she had 'come' in the betting, he would hardly average tens with the rest. What fool had put his oar in?

He learned the explanation two days later. The rash, the unknown backer, was 'Jimmy'! He had acted, it appeared, from jealousy; a bookmaker—it took one's breath away!

"Backed her on your own just because that young 'Cocoon' told you he fancied her!"

'Jimmy' looked up from the table in his 'office,' where he was sitting in wait for the scanty custom of the Long Vacation.

"She's not *his* horse," he said sullenly. "I wasn't going to have *him* get the cream."

"What did you put on?" growled Pulcher.

"Took five hundred to thirty, and fifteen twenties."

"An' see what it's done—knocked the bottom out of the commission. Am I to take that fifty as part of it?"

'Jimmy' nodded.

"That leaves an 'undred to invest," said Pulcher, somewhat mollified. He stood, with his

mind twisting in his thick still body. "It's no good waitin' now," he said; "I'll work the rest of the money on to-day. If I can average tens on the balance, we'll 'ave six thousand three hundred to play with and the stakes. They tell me Jenning fancies this Diamond Stud of his. *He* ought to know the form with Callĭōpe, blast him! We got to watch that."

They had! Diamond Stud, a four-year-old with eight stone two, was being backed as if the Cambridgeshire were over. From fifteens he advanced to sevens, thence to favouritism at fives. Pulcher bit on it. Jenning *must* know where he stood with Calliope! It meant—it meant she couldn't win! The tactician wasted no time in vain regret. Establish Calliope in the betting and lay off. The time had come to utilise The Shirker.

It was misty on the Downs—fine-weather mist of a bright October. The three horses became spectral on their way to the starting-point. Polman had thrown the Parrot in again, but this time he made no secret of the weights. The Shirker was carrying eight seven, Calliope eight, the Parrot seven stone.

Once more, in the cart, with his glasses sweeping the bright mist, 'Jimmy' had that pit-patting in his heart. Here they came! His mare lead-

ing—all riding hard—a genuine finish! They passed—The Shirker beaten, a clear length, with the Parrot at his girth. Beside him in the cart, George Pulcher mumbled:

"She's The Shirker at eight stone four, 'Jimmy'!"

A silent drive, big with thought, back to a river inn; a silent breakfast. Over a tankard at the close the Oracle spoke.

"The Shirker, at eight stone four, is a good 'ot chance, but no cert, 'Jimmy.' We'll let 'em know this trial quite open, weights and all. That'll bring her in the betting. And we'll watch Diamond Stud. If he drops back we'll know Jenning thinks he can't beat us now. If Diamond Stud stands up, we'll know Jenning thinks he's still got our mare safe. Then our line'll be clear: we lay off the lot, pick up a thousand or so, and 'ave the mare in at a nice weight at Liverpool."

'Jimmy's' smudged-in eyes stared hungrily.

"How's that?" he said. "Suppose she wins!"

"Wins! If we lay off the lot, she *won't* win."

"Pull her!"

George Pulcher's voice sank half an octave with disgust.

"Pull her! Who talked of pullin'? She'll run a bye, that's all. We shan't ever know whether she could 'a won or not."

'Jimmy' sat silent; the situation was such as his life during sixteen years had waited for. They stood to win both ways with a bit of handling.

"Who's to ride?" he said.

"Polman's got a call on Docker. He can just ride the weight. Either way he's good for us—strong finisher, and a rare judge of distance; knows how to time things to a T. Win or not, he's our man."

'Jimmy' was deep in figures. Laying-off at sevens, they would still win four thousand and the stakes.

"I'd like a win," he said.

"Ah!" said Pulcher. "But there'll be twenty in the field, my son; no more uncertain race than that bally Cambridgeshire. We could pick up a thou—— as easy as I pick up this pot. Bird in the 'and, 'Jimmy,' and a good 'andicap in the bush. If she wins, she's finished. Well, we'll put this trial about and see 'ow Jenning pops."

Jenning popped amazingly. Diamond Stud receded a point, then re-established himself at nine to two. Jenning was clearly not dismayed.

George Pulcher shook his head, and waited, uncertain still which way to jump. Ironical circumstance decided him.

Term had begun; 'Jimmy' was busy at his seat of custom. By some miracle of guardianly

intervention, young Colquhoun had not gone broke. He was 'up' again, eager to retrieve his reputation, and that little brute 'Jimmy' would not lay against his horse! He merely sucked in his cheeks, and answered: "I'm not layin' my own 'orse." It was felt that he was not the man he had been; assertion had come into his manner, he was better dressed. Someone had seen him at the station looking quite a 'toff' in a blue box-cloth coat standing well out from his wisp of a figure, and with a pair of brown race-glasses slung over the shoulder. Altogether the 'little brute was getting too big for his boots.'

And this strange improvement hardened the feeling that his horse was a real good thing. Patriotism began to burn in Oxford. Here was a 'snip' that belonged to them, as it were, and the money in support of it, finding no outlet, began to ball.

A week before the race—with Calliope at nine to one, and very little doing—young Colquhoun went up to town, taking with him the accumulated support of betting Oxford. That evening she stood at sixes. Next day the public followed on.

George Pulcher took advantage. In this crisis of the proceedings he acted on his own initiative. The mare went back to eights, but the deed was

done. He had laid off the whole bally lot, including the stake money. He put it to 'Jimmy' that evening in a nutshell.

"We pick up a thousand, and the Liverpool as good as in our pocket. I've done worse."

'Jimmy' grunted out: "She could 'a won."

"Not she. Jenning knows—and there's others in the race. This Wasp is goin' to take a lot of catchin', and Deerstalker's not out of it. He's a hell of a horse, even with that weight."

Again 'Jimmy' grunted, slowly sucking down his gin and bitters. Sullenly he said:

"Well, I don' want to put money in the pocket of young 'Cocoon' and his crowd. Like his impudence, backin' my horse as if it was his own."

"We'll 'ave to go and see her run, 'Jimmy.'"

"Not me," said 'Jimmy.'

"What! First time she runs! It won't look natural."

"No," repeated 'Jimmy.' "I don't want to see 'er beat."

George Pulcher laid his hand on a skinny shoulder.

"Nonsense, 'Jimmy.' You've got to, for the sake of your reputation. You'll enjoy seein' your mare saddled. We'll go up over night. I shall 'ave a few pound on Deerstalker. I believe he can beat this Diamond Stud. And you leave Docker

to me; I'll 'ave a word with him at Gatwick tomorrow. I've known 'im since he was that 'igh; an' 'e ain't much more now."

"All right!" growled 'Jimmy.'

V

The longer you can bet on a race the greater its fascination. Handicappers can properly enjoy the beauty of their work; clubmen and oracles of the course have due scope for reminiscence and prophecy; bookmakers in lovely leisure can indulge a little their own calculated preferences, instead of being hurried to soulless conclusions by a half-hour's market on the course; the professional backer has the longer in which to dream of his fortune made at last by some hell of a horse—spotted somewhere as interfered with, left at the post, running green, too fat, not fancied, backward—now bound to win this hell of a race. And the general public has the chance to read the horses' names in the betting news for days and days; and what a comfort that is!

'Jimmy' Shrewin was not one of those philosophers who justify the great and growing game of betting on the ground that it improves the breed of an animal less and less in use. He justified it much more simply—he lived by it. And in the

whole of his career of nearly twenty years since he made hole-and-corner books among the boys of London, he had never stood so utterly on velvet as that morning when his horse must win him five hundred pounds by merely losing. He had spent the night in London anticipating a fraction of his gains with George Pulcher at a music-hall. And, in a first-class carriage, as became an owner, he travelled down to Newmarket by an early special. An early special key turned in the lock of the carriage door, preserved their numbers at six, all professionals, with blank, rather rolling eyes, mouths shut or slightly fishy, ears to the ground; and the only natural talker a red-faced man, who had "been at it thirty years." Intoning the pasts and futures of this hell of a horse or that, even he was silent on the race in hand; and the journey was half over before the beauty of their own judgments loosened tongues thereon. George Pulcher started it.

"I fancy Deerstalker," he said; "he's a hell of a horse."

"Too much weight," said the red-faced man. "What about this Calliope?"

"Ah!" said Pulcher. "D' you fancy your mare, 'Jimmy'?"

With all eyes turned on him, lost in his blue box-cloth coat, brown bowler, and cheroot smoke,

'Jimmy' experienced a subtle thrill. Addressing the space between the red-faced man and Pulcher, he said:

"If she runs up to 'er looks."

"Ah!" said Pulcher, "she's dark—nice mare, but a bit light and shelly."

"Lopez out o' Calendar," muttered the red-faced man. "Lopez didn't stay, but he was the hell of a horse over seven furlongs. The Shirker ought to 'ave told you a bit."

'Jimmy' did not answer. It gave him pleasure to see the red-faced man's eye trying to get past. and failing.

"Nice race to pick up. Don't fancy the favourite meself; he'd nothin' to beat at Ascot."

"Jenning knows what he's about," said Pulcher.

Jenning! Before 'Jimmy's' mind passed again that first sight of his horse, and the trainer's smile, as if he—Jimmy Shrewin, who owned her—had been dirt. Tyke! To have the mare beaten by one of his! A deep, subtle vexation had oppressed him at times all these last days since George Pulcher had decided in favour of the mare's running a bye. D—n George Pulcher! He took too much on himself! Thought he had 'Jimmy' Shrewin in his pocket! He looked at the block of crimson opposite. Aunt Sally! If

George Pulcher could tell what was passing in his mind!

But driving up to the Course he was not above sharing a sandwich and a flask. In fact, his feelings were unstable and gusty—sometimes resentment, sometimes the old respect for his friend's independent bulk. The dignity of ownership takes long to establish itself in those who have been kicked about.

"All right with Docker," murmured Pulcher, sucking at the wicker flask. "I gave him the office at Gatwick."

"She could 'a won," muttered 'Jimmy.'

"Not she, my boy; there's two at least can beat 'er."

Like all oracles, George Pulcher could believe what he wanted to.

Arriving, they entered the grand-stand enclosure, and over the dividing railings 'Jimmy' gazed at the Cheap Ring, already filling up with its usual customers. Faces and umbrellas—the same old crowd. How often had he been in that Cheap Ring, with hardly room to move, seeing nothing, hearing nothing but "Two to one on the field!" "Two to one on the field!" "Threes Swordfish!" "Fives Alabaster!" "Two to one on the field!" Nothing but a sea of men like himself, and a sky overhead. He was not exactly

conscious of criticism, only of a dull 'Glad I'm shut of that lot' feeling.

Leaving George Pulcher deep in conversation with a crony, he lighted a cheroot, and slipped out on to the Course. He passed the Jockey Club enclosure. Some early 'toffs' were there in twos and threes, exchanging wisdom. He looked at them without envy or malice. He was an owner himself now, almost one of them in a manner of thinking. With a sort of relish he thought of how his past life had circled round those 'toffs,' slippery, shadowlike, kicked about; and now he could get up on the Downs away from 'toffs,' George Pulcher, all that crowd, and smell the grass, and hear the bally larks, and watch his own mare gallop!

They were putting the numbers up for the first race. Queer not to be betting, not to be touting round; queer to be giving it a rest! Utterly familiar with those names on the board, he was utterly unfamiliar with the shapes they stood for.

'I'll go and see 'em come out of the paddock,' he thought, and moved on, skimpy in his bell-shaped coat and billycock with flattened brim. The clamour of the Rings rose behind him while he was entering the paddock.

Very green, very peaceful, there; not many people, yet! Three horses in the second race were

being led slowly in a sort of winding ring; and men were clustering round the further gate where the horses would come out. 'Jimmy' joined them, sucking at his cheroot. They were a picture! Damn it! he didn't know but that 'orses laid over men! Pretty creatures!

One by one they passed out of the gate, a round dozen. Selling platers, but pictures for all that!

He turned back towards the horses being led about; and the old instinct to listen took him close to little groups. Talk was all of the big race. From a tall 'toff' he caught the word Calliope.

"Belongs to a bookie, they say."

Bookie! Why not? Wasn't a bookie as good as any other? Ah! and sometimes better than these young snobs with everything to their hand! A bookie—well, what chance had he ever had?

A big brown horse came by.

"That's Deerstalker," he heard the 'toff' say.

'Jimmy' gazed at George Pulcher's fancy with a sort of hostility. Here came another—Wasp, six stone ten, and Deerstalker nine stone—top and bottom of the race!

'My 'orse'd beat either o' them,' he thought stubbornly. 'Don't like that Wasp.'

The distant roar was hushed. They were running in the first race! He moved back to the gate. The quick clamour rose and dropped, and

here they came—back into the paddock, darkened with sweat, flanks heaving a little!

'Jimmy' followed the winner, saw the jockey weigh in.

"What jockey's that?" he asked.

"That? Why, Docker!"

'Jimmy' stared. A short, square, bow-legged figure, with a hardwood face! Waiting his chance, he went up to him and said:

"Docker, you ride my 'orse in the big race."

"Mr. Shrewin?"

"The same," said 'Jimmy.' The jockey's left eyelid drooped a little. Nothing responded in 'Jimmy's' face. "I'll see you before the race," he said.

Again the jockey's eyelid wavered, he nodded and passed on.

'Jimmy' stared at his own boots; they struck him suddenly as too yellow and not at the right angle. But why, he couldn't say.

More horses now—those of the first race being unsaddled, clothed, and led away. More men—three familiar figures: young 'Cocoon' and two others of his Oxford customers.

'Jimmy' turned sharply from them. Stand their airs?—not he! He had a sudden sickish feeling. With a win, he'd have been a made man—on his own! Blast George Pulcher and his cau-

tion! To think of being back in Oxford with those young bloods jeering at his beaten horse! He bit deep into the stump of his cheroot, and suddenly came on Jenning standing by a horse with a star on its bay forehead. The trainer gave him no sign of recognition, but signed to the boy to lead the horse into a stall, and followed, shutting the door. It was exactly as if he had said: 'Vermin about!'

An evil little smile curled 'Jimmy's' lips. The tyke!

The horses for the second race passed out of the paddock gate, and he turned to find his own. His ferreting eyes soon sighted Polman. What the cat-faced fellow knew, or was thinking, 'Jimmy' could not tell. Nobody could tell.

"Where's the mare?" he said.

"Just coming round."

No mistaking her; fine as a star; shiny-coated, sinuous, her blazed face held rather high! Who said she was 'shelly'? She was a picture! He walked a few paces close to the boy.

"That's Calliope. . . . H'm! . . . Nice filly! . . . Looks fit. . . . Who's this James Shrewin? . . . What's she at? . . . I like her looks."

His horse! Not a prettier filly in the world!

He followed Polman into her stall to see her saddled. In the twilight there he watched her

toilet; the rub-over; the exact adjustments; the bottle of water to the mouth; the buckling of the bridle—watched her head high above the boy keeping her steady with gentle pulls of a rein in each hand held out a little wide, and now and then stroking her blazed nose; watched her pretence of nipping at his hand: he watched the beauty of her exaggerated in this half-lit isolation away from the others, the life and litheness in her satin body, the wilful expectancy in her bright soft eyes.

Run a bye! This bit o' blood—this bit o' fire! This horse of his! Deep within that shell of blue box-cloth against the stall partition a thought declared itself: 'I'm —— if she shall! She can beat the lot! And she's—— well going to!'

The door was thrown open, and she led out. He moved alongside. They were staring at her, following her. No wonder! She was a picture, his horse—his! She had gone to 'Jimmy's' head.

They passed Jenning with Diamond Stud waiting to be mounted. 'Jimmy' shot him a look. Let the —— wait!

His mare reached the palings and was halted. 'Jimmy' saw the short square figure of her jockey, in the new magenta cap and jacket—*his* cap, *his* jacket! Beautiful they looked, and no mistake!

"A word with you," he said.

The jockey halted, looked quickly round.

"All right, Mr. Shrewin. I know."

'Jimmy's' eyes smouldered at him; hardly moving his lips, he said, intently: "You—well don't! You'll—well ride her to win. Never mind *him!* If you don't, I'll have you off the turf. Understand me! You'll—well ride 'er to win."

The jockey's jaw dropped.

"All right, Mr. Shrewin."

"See it is," said 'Jimmy' with a hiss. . . .

"Mount jockeys!"

He saw magenta swing into the saddle. And suddenly, as if smitten with the plague, he scuttled away.

VI

He scuttled to where he could see them going down—seventeen. No need to search for his colours; they blazed, like George Pulcher's countenance, or a rhododendron bush in sunlight, above that bright chestnut with the white nose, curvetting a little as she was led past.

Now they came cantering—Deerstalker in the lead.

"He's a hell of a horse, Deerstalker," said someone behind.

'Jimmy' cast a nervous glance around. No sign of George Pulcher!

One by one they cantered past, and he watched them with a cold feeling in his stomach. Still unused to sight of the creatures out of which he made his living, they *all* seemed to him hells of horses.

The same voice said:

"New colours! Well, you can see 'em, and the mare too. She's a showy one. Calliope? She's goin' back in the bettin', though."

'Jimmy' moved up through the Ring.

"Four to one on the field!" "Six Deerstalker!" "Sevens Magistrate!" "Ten to one Wasp!" "Ten to one Calliope!" "Four to one Diamond Stud!" "Four to one on the field!"

Steady as a rock, that horse of Jenning, and his own going back!

"Twelves Calliope!" he heard, just as he reached the stand. The telepathic genius of the Ring missed nothing—almost!

A cold shiver went through him. What had he done by his words to Docker? Spoiled the golden egg laid so carefully? But perhaps she couldn't win even if they let her! He began to mount the stand, his mind in the most acute confusion.

A voice said: "Hullo, 'Jimmy'! Is she going to win?"

One of his young Oxford sparks was jammed against him on the stairway!

He raised his lip in a sort of snarl, and, huddling himself, slipped through and up ahead. He came out and edged in close to the stairs where he could get play for his glasses. Behind him one of those who improve the shining hour among backers cut off from opportunity, was intoning the odds a point shorter than below. "Three to one on the field." "Fives Deerstalker." "Eight to one Wasp."

"What price Calliope?" said 'Jimmy.' sharply.

"Hunderd to eight."

"Done!" Handing him the eight, he took the ticket. Behind him the man's eyes moved fishily, and he resumed his incantation.

"Three to one on the field . . . three to one on the field. Six to one Magistrate."

On the wheeling bunch of colours at the start 'Jimmy' trained his glasses. Something had broken clean away and come half the course—something in yellow.

"Eights Magistrate. Eight to one Magistrate," drifted up.

So they had spotted that! Precious little they didn't spot!

Magistrate was round again, and being ridden back. 'Jimmy' rested his glasses a moment, and looked down. Swarms in the Cheap Ring, Tatter-

salls, the stands—a crowd so great, you could lose George Pulcher in it. Just below a little man was making silent, frantic signals with his arms across to someone in the Cheap Ring. 'Jimmy' raised his glasses. In line now—magenta third from the rails!

"They're off!" The hush, you could cut it with a knife! Something in green away on the right—Wasp! What a bat they were going! And a sort of numbness in 'Jimmy's' mind cracked suddenly; his glasses shook; his thin, weasley face became suffused and quivered. Magenta—magenta—two from the rails! He could make no story of the race such as he would read in to-morrow's paper—he could see nothing but magenta.

Out of the dip now, and coming fast—green still leading—something in violet, something in tartan, closing.

"Wasp's beat!" "The favourite—the favourite wins!" "Deerstalker—Deerstalker wins!" "What's that in pink on the rails?"

It was *his* in pink on the rails! Behind him a man went suddenly mad.

"Deerstalker—Come on with 'im, Stee! Deerstalker 'll win—Deerstalker 'll win!"

'Jimmy' sputtered venomously: "Will 'e? Will 'e?"

Deerstalker and his own out from the rest—

opposite the Cheap Ring—neck and neck—Docker riding like a demon.

"Deerstalker! Deerstalker!" "Calliope wins! She wins!"

Gawd! His horse! They flashed past—fifty yards to go, and not a head between 'em!

"Deerstalker! Deerstalker!" "Calliope!"

He saw his mare shoot out—she'd won!

With a little queer sound he squirmed and wriggled on to the stairs. No thoughts while he squeezed, and slid, and hurried—only emotion—out of the Ring, away to the paddock. His horse!

Docker had weighed in when he reached the mare. All right! He passed with a grin. 'Jimmy' turned almost into the body of Polman standing like an image.

"Well, Mr. Shrewin," he said to nobody, "she's won."

'Damn you!' thought 'Jimmy.' 'Damn the lot of you!' And he went up to his mare. Quivering, streaked with sweat, impatient of the gathering crowd, she showed the whites of her eyes when he put his hand up to her nose.

"Good girl!" he said, and watched her led away.

'Gawd! I want a drink!' he thought.

Gingerly, keeping a sharp lookout for Pulcher, he returned to the Stand to get it, and to draw

his hundred. But up there by the stairs the discreet fellow was no more. On the ticket was the name O. H. Jones, and nothing else. 'Jimmy' Shrewin had been welshed! He went down at last in a bad temper. At the bottom of the staircase stood George Pulcher. The big man's face was crimson, his eyes ominous. He blocked 'Jimmy' into a corner.

"Ah!" he said; "you little crow! What the 'ell made you speak to Docker?"

'Jimmy' grinned. Some new body within him stood there defiant. "She's my 'orse," he said.

"You—Gawd-forsaken rat! If I 'ad you in a quiet spot, I'd shake the life out of you!"

'Jimmy' stared up, his little spindle legs apart, like a cock-sparrow confronting an offended pigeon.

"Go 'ome," he said, "George Pulcher; and get your mother to mend your socks. You don't know 'ow! Thought I wasn't a man, did you? Well, now you —— well know I am. Keep off my 'orse in future."

Crimson rushed up on crimson in Pulcher's face; he raised his heavy fists. 'Jimmy' stood, unmoving, his little hands in his bell-coat pockets, his withered face upraised. The big man gulped as if swallowing back the tide of blood; his fists edged forward and then—dropped.

"That's better," said 'Jimmy,' "hit one of your own size."

Emitting a deep growl, George Pulcher walked away.

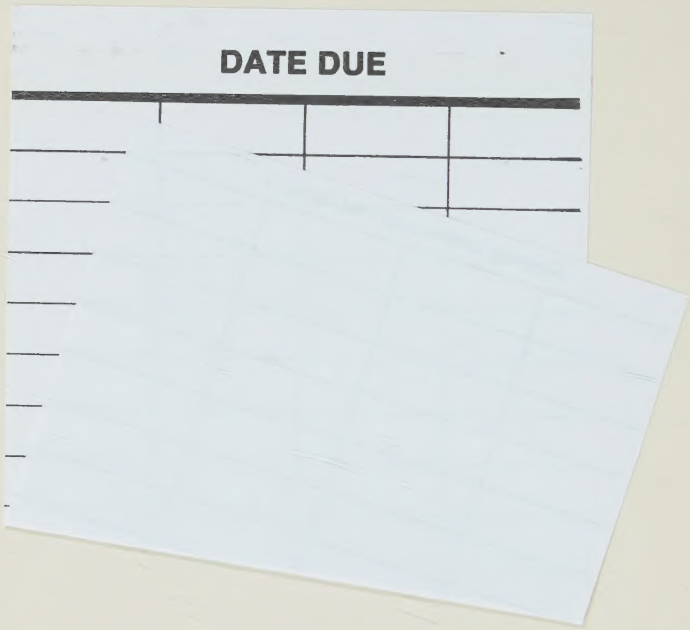
"Two to one on the field—I'll back the field—Two to one on the field." "Threes Snowdrift—Fours Iron Dook."

'Jimmy' stood a moment mechanically listening to the music of his life, then edging out, he took a fly and was driven to the station.

All the way up to town he sat chewing his cheroot with the glow of drink inside him, thinking of that finish, and of how he had stood up to George Pulcher. For a whole day he was lost in London, but Friday saw him once more at his seat of custom in the 'Corn.' Not having laid against his horse, he had had a good race in spite of everything; yet, the following week, uncertain into what further quagmires of quixotry she might lead him, he sold Calliope.

But for years betting upon horses that he never saw, underground like a rat, yet never again so accessible to the kicks of fortune, or so prone before the shafts of superiority, he would think of the Downs with the blinkin' larks singin', and talk of how once he—had a horse.

1923.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